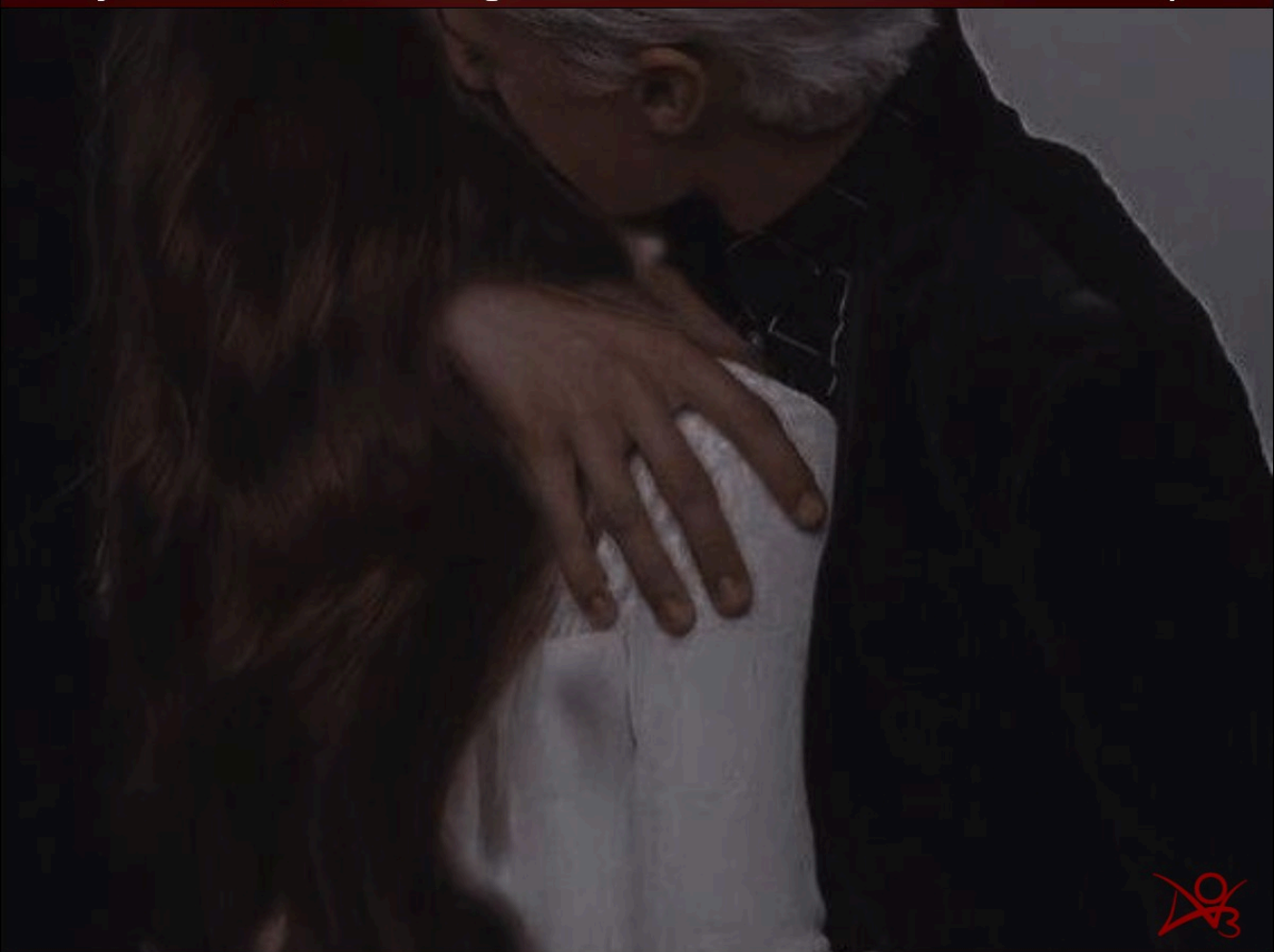


On the Nature of Daylight

ikorous

Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling

Complete



On the Nature of Daylight

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Summary

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Description:

Hermione Granger wanted to lose control. And Draco Malfoy wanted to take it.

1. one

Chapter 1

Hermione slammed the door behind her, blinked hard against the tears that were filling her eyes, and ran down the darkened corridor. She didn't know where she was headed. She didn't really care either. Ron had just kissed Lavender Brown right in front of her. In front of everyone. Losing house points didn't matter too much at the moment.

She slowed as she reached the familiar landing that led to the Library. Of course her feet would have carried her here. She sighed and wiped her eyes; only then realizing her wand was still in her hand. She felt a little bad about sending the birds after Ron, but she felt worse when she thought about the way he had wrapped his arms around Lavender so easily, as if she hadn't been there at all. Tucking her wand back pocket, Hermione pushed open the large door with a creak and slipped inside.

The Library was dark and quiet. She walked forward a bit before stopping. She didn't really know what she was doing here other than fleeing the images of Ron and Lavender together, but sadly, they didn't seem to be going anywhere but on a constant loop in her head. Even the hundreds of books in the Hogwarts Library couldn't distract her tonight.

But she could try. What else did she have to do anyways? Her fingers ran over the dust-covered shelves lightly before a dark corner caught her eye. The Restricted Section. If there was anything that could keep her mind off of Ron tonight, it would be in there. Hermione cast a quick look around to make sure she was alone then made for the metal gate that blocked off the most dangerous and powerful books that Hogwarts had to offer.

Normally students would need a signed note from a Professor to be presented to Madam Pince for entry, but Hermione had gotten one of these so many times for extra reading and extra credit assignments that the Librarian had just given her the password to the Restricted Section to cut down on time.

"Lectio Nefastus," Hermione whispered and the gate spun open. She latched it behind her and made her way into the dark stacks. The shelves were closer together in this part of the Library, not normally needing to accommodate more than one person at a time. Instead of the warm orange glow of candles and lanterns, a pale blue light cascaded down from floating candles similar to the ones in the Great Hall, but not near as many and not near as bright. It was eerily dark in the stacks this late at night.

She wandered for a bit, mulling over what it was she wanted to pull off of the shelf and get lost in. Books on curses, poisons, and dangerous spells lined the walls. Hermione passed them over. She felt guilty enough about sending the birds after Ron, she couldn't imagine what some of these volumes held in them. There was an interesting book, bound in dark green leather that she reached out for when she heard him.

“And what exactly is the Gryffindor Princess doing wandering around the Restricted Section after hours?” He had a drawling voice that always seemed to be part patronizing and part sarcastic. Hermione had come to despise his voice, his tone, his... *everything*.

She turned, glaring at him, but jumped back when she realized how close he was to her.

Draco Malfoy was the last person she wanted to see right now. Well, maybe next to last, after Ron. And Lavender. Hermione swallowed against the lump in her throat and hoped she didn't look like she had just been crying. Merlin knows Malfoy would tease her mercilessly if he found out.

“None of your business,” she snapped.

“Oh ho ho,” Malfoy raised an eyebrow. “Something the matter, Granger? You're a bit touchy tonight.”

Hermione bristled. “Go away,” she muttered and turned away from him. She waited a moment, but he didn't leave. In fact she could feel him staring at her. “What?” She snapped, turning back towards him.

Malfoy's eyes were a stormy grey but under the pale blue light they looked almost silver. She was taken aback for a moment as a floating candle passed right over them, illuminating his white blond hair, his sharply angled cheekbones, and his tall frame. Hermione blocked out those thoughts as she had blocked them out many times before.

“You've been crying,” he said in a strange tone.

Great. He noticed. Now would come the torment. Well, it couldn't be any worse than what she had witnessed earlier.

“Who made you cry?”

“Afraid someone is taking your place?” Hermione spat as nastily as she could and tried to sniff quietly.

Malfoy's grey eyes bore into hers until she looked away. He had this habit of staring at her and sometimes Hermione felt like he could see right through her. She would catch him sometimes, in classes, in the corridors, staring at her, watching her. He would sneer and his eyes would flick away most of the time, but sometimes... they would stay on her. She would stare back, trapped in his gaze, until one of them broke it.

“No one takes anything from me,” he said darkly.

Hermione glanced back up at him. Why couldn't they have placed the shelves a little further apart? The Library was a big place, certainly they could have spared a few extra inches in the Restricted Section so that Malfoy wouldn't be standing so close to her right now.

Why was he though? Didn't he normally act like her mere presence could infect him with some horrible disease? She thought back to fourth year when her arm brushed his in Potions and he wiped it off much to Pansy's amusement. Ugh. Even Pansy could get a guy to like her... What was so wrong with her that she was almost the only girl left in her year that hadn't had a boyfriend? And why was she suddenly upset over that fact?

“Well all I need is this book,” Hermione reached for the green leather book again, but Malfoy snatched it off the shelf before she could get it. Sighing she said, “Give it back, Malfoy,” and crossed her arms over her chest.

Malfoy smirked down at her. Being this close made him tower over her and she hated the fact that she had to actually look up to him. Malfoy ran a long finger down the spine then opened it, thumbing through the pages.

“*Wicked Warlocks of the Western World*,” He read aloud the title. “But you’re such a good little girl, what would you even do with a book like this?” His smirk widened.

“Read it,” Hermione stuck out her chin and reached for the book, but Malfoy jerked it back and held it up over his head. Not one to be defeated, Hermione lunged for it. He obviously had not been expecting this because when her body collided with his, he didn’t push her away. Instead his eyes widened with surprise as her hands landed on his chest and she couldn’t help but feel the muscles that hours of Quidditch training had left on his body.

“Granger,” Malfoy said her name.

Hermione looked up at him, those dark grey eyes trained on her.

“You’re touching me,” he finished.

Hermione pulled back. “Afraid I’ll get you dirty?” She narrowed her eyes.

Malfoy’s eyes stayed wide for a moment longer before they moved down the length of her body and back up to her own.

“Quite the opposite,” he muttered.

Hermione blinked in surprise. What did that mean?

“You ought to be more careful,” He snarled. There he was; the bully she had known for years. “You could get yourself in a lot of trouble doing something like that.” His voice was low and dangerous.

“Is that a threat?” she retorted.

Malfoy’s expression was unreadable. That was one thing she noticed about their little staring spells; she could never tell what he was thinking.

“Yes,” he said darkly and took a step forward. Hermione’s back hit the shelves behind her and he was only inches away from her. “That is most definitely a threat.”

Hermione was in no mood to be trifled with tonight. She had come here for some peace and quiet, not to be intimidated by Malfoy. “Try me,” She lifted her face up, glaring at him with a fire in her eyes.

He paused. Expression still a mystery, but thrown off for a second by her answer. Then he laughed. He laughed in her face.

Hermione glared darkly at him.

“If I even thought for a minute you actually meant that...” Malfoy trailed off, shaking his head.

“You think I’m all talk?” Her emotional turmoil was making her brash. All of these awful feelings swirled in her and finally she found an outlet in Malfoy. ‘Everyone thinks I’m just some bookworm, don’t they?’ She started getting louder. “They think I am just some robot that feeds off of routines and repetition. That I’m nothing but ‘good old Granger’ who never does anything she isn’t supposed to!” Hermione fumed.

That’s why Ron had kissed Lavender. He had never even really seen her as girlfriend material, even after she had asked him to Slughorn’s party. Lavender was bouncy and playful. She flirted and giggled. Of course Ron would be interested in a girl like that instead of... instead of her.

“I don’t know,” Hermione sighed sadly. “Maybe they’re right.”

Malfoy’s hand wrapped around the side of her neck, forcing her face up towards his. She stifled a gasp as he bent down, hovering over her. “Oh Granger,” He breathed out and she could feel his breath on her lips. “You’re so much more than that.”

His lips were inches, millimeters away from hers. Hermione stopped breathing, frozen in place between Malfoy and the silent books behind her. Her eyes were wide, trying to take in information, to understand what was happening right now.

“Let me know if you ever want to find out what that is,” he whispered, brushing his thumb over her jawline.

Hermione closed her eyes. Too much now. Too much to handle.

His hand slithered off of her neck and slowly she opened her eyes up again. He was already moving away from her, the pale blue eyes flames illuminating his silver eyes as he backed away. Hermione’s heart was racing, thundering in her ears, but not loud enough to block out the sound of his dark chuckle as she stood, perfect in place, where he had left her.

2. two

Chapter 2

Hermione sat at the breakfast table, poking at her eggs and resting her face in her curled hand. Last night was a fluke. It had to be. Some sort of game Malfoy was playing. He had always picked on her, thinking she was easy prey. His grey eyes following her in the corridors, watching her, waiting for an opportunity to— To do what exactly?

She frowned. He still sneered at her and called her names, but his eyes... they had changed over the years. From disdainful to... almost playful; as if he was waiting for her to say something back to him instead of shaking her head and returning to her schoolwork.

But no. That was ridiculous. Malfoy didn't think of her in any way other than a filthy Mudblood. He had called her that enough times to know that could only be his opinion of her. So that meant that his little indiscretion in the Restricted Section last night had to be just another ploy to get under her skin.

"Let me know if you ever want to find out what that is."

Her head spun. With all her brains, she still couldn't figure out what he meant by that. What was he playing at? Was he trying to get her to duel him maybe? Did he have some horrible curse he was itching to try out on a new victim?

Hermione couldn't help it; she glanced up and over to the Slytherin table. He was easy to spot with his white blonde hair and tall frame that stood out among his classmates. She had expected to find his grey eyes staring back at her, but instead he was talking with Blaise Zabini with Crabbe and Goyle on either side of him.

He wasn't thinking about her. Why would he be though? He must have better things to do than think of the crying little Mudblood he had run into last night. He had his group of friends, he had—

Pansy threw her arms around his neck from behind him and kissed his cheek. Malfoy's mouth twitched in something similar to a smile, but not exactly. She placed a leg over the bench, straddling it as she faced him and held onto his arm. Dark eyes looked up at him with admiration and longing.

Right. He had a girlfriend. There was no way he had meant anything by that comment. Just trying to get under her skin, that's all. Yes, she caught him looking at her. Yes, he often sat at a desk near her. Yes, he made snide comments and then looked to her to see her reaction. But this was Malfoy and he would never even entertain the idea of Hermione as anything other than a Mudblood.

Malfoy pulled his arm away and Pansy pouted, tucking her short black hair behind her ear as she watched him continue his conversation with Zabini like she wasn't even there. Did he

treat everyone as inferior? Lording over his fellow Slytherins was his *modus operandi* after all.

He had his bodyguards, Crabbe and Goyle, although these days he didn't even need them that much. Malfoy knew quite a few dark spells and she had noticed how well he handled himself in the practical lessons of Defense Against the Dark Arts. She had also noticed the muscles under his clothes last night when she ran into his chest. Blushing, she blinked the thoughts away.

He had his lieutenants— Nott and Zabini; Smarter than Crabbe and Goyle, but not as dependable. They would turn on him as soon as help him if it meant they could take his place of power in their little circle. They reported to him, but only to further their own agendas, not because they were friends or felt any kind of loyalty.

Then he had his... paramour, Pansy Parkinson. She had made Hermione's life almost as miserable as Malfoy had. Her taunts often came as Hermione tried to fix her unruly hair in a bathroom mirror or comments on how undesirable Hermione was as she hung on Malfoy's arm. But even then, Malfoy's eyes had locked onto hers until Pansy's bark-like laugh caused him to scowl in annoyance.

And Pansy governed over the girls in Slytherin, keeping everyone in line and under control for him. Malfoy had made a comfortable little kingdom for himself to rule over, uncontested.

Hermione had surprised herself. When had she learned all this about him? Since when did she know the inner workings of the Slytherin social structure? Could it be that Malfoy wasn't the only one watching all these years?

She shook her head, curls falling around her face as she brought a bit of egg to her mouth. They had gone cold. She sighed and set her fork down.

The hairs on the back of her arms rose and so did her eyes, unbidden, to meet his across the Great Hall. Grey, storming, and on her. Her breath hitched in her chest. He had that look again, the one she couldn't quite put her finger on but it almost seemed like he was... waiting on something. What though? What could he possibly want?

The pale winter light filtered in from a paned window behind him, making his light blonde hair almost glow for a moment. She should look away. She should break contact. This was surely going to end with him shouting some expletive at her at any moment, but she couldn't bring herself to leave his gaze. He held her there, just like he had last night in the Restricted Section, just like he held court over his fellow Slytherins and Hermione, once again, let him.

His eyes narrowed slightly and his mouth pulled in a small smirk. She remembered how he laughed at her last night and she felt anger and embarrassment churn in her. No, she wasn't about to let him play with her again. He had caught her off guard last night, that's all that was. The fact that she remained, pinned, against the shelves long after he had disappeared didn't mean anything.

The high-pitched giggle of Lavender Brown was what finally pulled her attention from him. They were walking in together, Ron's arm over her shoulders and her hand resting on his chest. He pulled on a long curl of hers playfully and Hermione inhaled sharply at this small but significant action.

His eyes landed on hers and quickly she glanced away, back at the plate of uneaten food in front of her. She hated to waste it, knowing that the house elves worked hard to make it, but suddenly she had lost her appetite.

Lavender picked up a piece of bacon and was hand feeding Ron who seemed to have completely forgotten Hermione was even a person on Earth, let alone his best friend. And maybe more. No. Not now.

Harry looked about as uncomfortable as she felt, but he was still sitting with Ron despite his atrocious behavior. He gave her a small sympathetic smile that she was sure was supposed to be in solidarity, but as always, Harry had chosen Ron and Hermione was the one left out.

She pushed herself away from the table and made her way quickly out of the Great Hall. She didn't look at Harry or Ron, and especially not Lavender, on her way out. But right before she disappeared through the large entry doors, Hermione did turn, briefly, and saw that Draco Malfoy was still watching her.

And suddenly, she knew that expression, having had it so many times herself. His eyes, slightly narrowed. His lips pressed together. His brows pulled in the middle. Malfoy was studying her, watching her, trying to figure her out.

She ducked out of sight, trying to catch her breath that she hadn't realized she had been holding. Hermione leaned against the wall in between two suits or armor, her eyes wide as she tried to make sense of what just happened. Draco Malfoy was gathering information on her. And he could see right through her.

She was leaving the Library late again. It had always been somewhere she spent a lot of time, but never as much as when she was fighting with Ron. Somehow, he seemed to fill the common room no matter how far away she tried to sit from him and lately Lavender's giggles and sighs were insufferable.

Her dorm was not much better. She could get a few hours of peace there before Lavender came in, throwing herself on her bed and talking loudly with Parvati about Ron and everything that they had done that evening. So she had been taking refuge in the one place that Ron hardly ever visited, the Library.

She put her book back on the shelf and headed out through the stacks. The iron gate to the Restricted Section caught her eye and Hermione shook her head, curly hair tumbling into her face, trying to rid herself of the memories of that night almost a week ago. She puzzled over it the following day and decided that it was just a new game Malfoy was trying to play and the best way to beat him was to not play the game at all.

So she had been avoiding him as much as she had been Ron. But still, every now and then, she would catch those rain-grey eyes on her and her breath would hitch in her throat until she turned back to her notes.

Ron had barely even remembered she existed.

Hermione sighed and pushed open the door, walking into the darkened hallway. Her feet led her back up the familiar stairs to the Gryffindor common room, but as she neared she

slowed to a stop. It was late, yes, but chances were Ron and Lavender were still in the common room and even if they weren't, Lavender was sure to still be up, chatting away with Parvati in her dorm.

She turned away from the portrait of the Fat Lady. If she was stopped she would say she was patrolling. Sure, it wasn't her scheduled night, but Hermione could not stomach seeing them together again.

Harry had done his best to split his time and she could tell that he wasn't too thrilled with Ron's overzealous public displays of affection, but being around Harry wasn't exactly calming these days either. If he wasn't harping on about Malfoy being a Death Eater then he was brooding and staring moodily into the fire with quick glances at Ginny every now and then. Not to mention the fact that he was quickly becoming obsessed with his second-hand potions book that gave Hermione an uneasy feeling with its extra notes and instructions.

Maybe she should just go back. Harry probably felt just as bad as she did, watching Ginny and Dean together, and maybe they could keep each other company. But if he started talking about Malfoy again... Hermione rubbed her forehead where she felt a headache coming on. She didn't want to think about Malfoy right now.

"Granger?"

Speak of the devil...

He had appeared out of thin air. He must have; there were no doors in the corridor. Hermione glanced up and down, trying to figure out where he even came from.

"We have to stop meeting like this," he said in a low voice.

"I agree," she snapped.

Malfoy chuckled. She was really coming to dislike that sound.

"Someone might think something was going on between us," he took a few steps closer to her. "Late night rendezvous..."

"Hardly," Hermione scoffed.

Malfoy advanced on her. "Twice in one week... you greedy girl," he murmured and his grey eyes shone brightly in the moonlight.

Hermione saw it then, his wand, in his hand. Not pointed at her, but still a weapon. A threat.

"I'm just going back to my common room," Hermione said.

"Isn't your tower in the opposite direction?" Malfoy drawled.

"Isn't yours in the dungeons? What are you doing up here anyways?" she asked as harshly as she could.

"Getting into trouble," Malfoy raised an eyebrow.

"I will tell Professor Snape you were out after hours," she said as he took another step towards her, his wand twirling in his fingers.

"I don't think you will," his voice was low.

"And why's that?" she snapped.

"Because then you'll have to explain why you were out after hours too," Malfoy smirked.

"I'm a Prefect," Hermione stuck out her chin. "I have a right to be out after hours."

"I'm a Malfoy," He retorted. "I have a right to everything."

Her back was against the wall. When had she started backing up? How had she let him corner her again?

She turned her face to the side, looking down at the stones on the floor as he moved his body closer to hers. He towered over her and she could hear him breathing heavily, but calmly. Controlled. He was always in control of himself and she seemed to be constantly flailing these days.

"And you're just a filthy Mudblood," he said in a sick tone.

Hermione's eyes darted up to his, flashing with anger.

"Not fit to lick my boots," his voice dripped with venom. She was about to open her mouth to argue back with him when he leaned down, his face close to hers again. "But I'd let you if you asked nicely."

She shoved him roughly away from her.

"Oh ho ho!" Malfoy laughed as he easily regained his balance. "Little kitten has claws."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "Try a wand," she snarled and pulled out her own, holding it firmly in her hand.

Malfoy eyed it for a moment then brought his eyes back to hers. "Glad to see you put your energy into something more useful than crying," Malfoy said snarkily. "Anger I can use."

"You're not using anything of mine," Hermione said quickly and something dark passed through Malfoy's eyes. "Now go back to your common room before I go to Professor Snape."

Malfoy hesitated for a moment, a curious expression on his face before he brushed past her saying "I knew you wouldn't tell on me, otherwise how will we keep having these late night visits?"

Hermione spun around, watching his dark form and blonde hair disappear down the corridor.

"Ginny, let go of me," Hermione laughed as her friend threw her arms around her neck.

"I feel like I haven't seen you in ages!" Ginny let go of her neck, only to grab onto her hand, pulling her into a chair in the common room. "You're never around anymore."

"I know," Hermione did her best not to look in Ron's direction, but Lavender's squeals of excitement crossed the room all the same.

“Disgusting,” Ginny shook her head. “Honestly, you’d think he’s be able to muster a bit of self control.”

“Not really Ronald’s strong suit,” Hermione commented.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “You know you don’t just have to disappear. It’s your common room too.”

Ginny’s solidarity was touching and Hermione felt a tad bit guilty that she had ignored her friend in an effort to avoid Ron.

“You’re right,” Hermione nodded. “And I think I will be around more.” At least here she didn’t risk running into Malfoy. Hermione risked a glance over her shoulder only to see Lavender put her leg across Ron’s lap and him running his hand up it. She quickly turned back around, looking at the floor. She could never imagine doing something like that in public, but Lavender seemed to have no problem with it. In fact, she was quite enjoying herself.

“Gross,” Ginny wrinkled her nose. ‘And not just because it’s my brother.’ She turned back to Hermione. “Where have you been even?”

“The Library,” Hermione sighed. What a typical, boring answer. No matter Ron jumped onto someone else at the first chance. Who would want a girl who spent almost all of her time in the Library over a girl who would wrap her legs around you in public?

“Hermione,” Ginny said softly and leaned forward. “You can’t hide away in there forever.”

“I know,” She mumbled.

“You need to put yourself out there!”

“I know,” She closed her eyes briefly.

“You need a date for Slughorn’s party.”

“I know, Ginny,” she said exasperated and leaned back in the chair. Now that Ron was out of the question she needed to find someone to take and fast. If she showed up alone... She couldn’t even bear the thought of it.

“Look, I’ll help you,” Ginny offered, clearly picking up on Hermione’s tired mood. “I can ask Dean if Seamus is going with anyone yet.”

“No, I don’t need you to set up my dates for me,” Hermione waved her hand. “Thank you, but I can do it on my own. I think... I think I have to, you know?”

The redhead nodded. “Yeah, I get that,” Her eyes cut across the room and her brow lowered. ‘Just make sure it’s someone good,’ she sneered. “Put that prick in his place.”

Things between Hermione and Ron only devolved over the next week. He was spending more time with Lavender and now seemed to be rubbing it in her face. The only break she got from it was the evenings where the Gryffindor Quidditch team had practice, but that also meant that Harry and Ginny were also out of the picture.

Lavender had declined to watch them practice due to the snow covering the stands and Hermione thought she might be able to stomach an evening in the common room if it was just one of them. She was wrong.

"He's so sweet, Parvati," Lavender gushed. "Just this morning he buttered my toast for me."

Hermione rolled her eyes behind her book.

"That is so sweet," Parvati agreed. "He's getting better at Quidditch too."

"Yes!" Lavender clapped her hands together. "He says I'm his muse," she sunk back in her chair and sighed.

How could one be a muse for a Keeper exactly? Unless he pictured her face on the Quaffles coming at him. Hermione snorted.

"Have something to say?" Lavender asked pointedly at Hermione.

She lowered her book and glanced over at the two girls a few seats away.

"Oh, nothing," she said.

"No, you've obviously got an opinion and you've never let anything stop you from sharing it before. What's different now?" Lavender said nastily.

Hermione felt hot licks of anger in her chest. "Ron's always been good at Quidditch," she mustered. "He was just nervous performing in public."

Lavender pursed her lips for a moment before answering. "Trust me, Hermione, he has no problem performing in public."

Her book hit the floor.

Lavender and Parvati exploded into a fit of giggles.

Hermione dashed to the portrait hole, needing to be anywhere but here right now. She was several flights of stairs away before she stopped, gasping for breath. She leaned against the cool wall, trying not to think of Ron and Lavender together. She fought against tears that pricked in her eyes but she would not let Lavender be the cause of them.

Then the idea sparked in her mind. She loved the feeling of figuring something out. Like the answer had been there all this time and only now she had blown the dust off of it. Hermione stalked through the halls until she reached the Entrance Hall just as the Gryffindor Quidditch team was coming back in from practice.

Their cheeks and noses were red with cold and Ginny was shaking snow out of her long red hair as Harry stared at her, watching it fall around her and melt as it touched her clothes.

"Ronald!" Hermione snapped. His head snapped up as she stormed across the empty space between them. She stopped in front of him and crossed her arms. "If you can kindly ask your girlfriend to not bring up intimate details of your relationship in the common room, you know we do have younger children who also share that space," she spat out nastily.

Ron looked surprised for a moment and glanced over to Harry who merely shrugged. He turned back to Hermione and let his blue eyes rest on her for a moment before his face broke into a smile.

"I can't help it if I make the girl excited," he reached out and pinched her cheek quickly. "You know what I mean."

Hermione's mouth dropped and a stunned expression took over her face. He had certainly gotten a big head since he had started dating Lavender, but this was beyond belief.

"You git!" Ginny shouted.

"Ron, that was..." Harry trailed off.

"Come on," Ron rolled his head on his shoulder. "Dean, back me up, mate."

Hermione tried her hardest to find something to say but for once, her voice failed her.

"Look, Hermione," Ron started again.

"Don't," she managed.

"Lav is a..." Ron searched for a word. "bold girl. It's refreshing."

"Stop," Hermione took a step back.

"Hermione—"

But she didn't want to hear anymore.

"Hermione, where are you going?" Ginny called after her as Hermione took off back into the deep levels of the castle. She heard shouting behind her for a little while, but then only silence as she wandered down further down. If that was what Ron really thought, then maybe he wasn't the guy she thought he was. And if he wasn't, what did that mean about the feelings she had? It was confusing and thoughts buzzed around in her head. She wished she had something to settle her, calm her.

It was colder down here and Hermione rubbed her arms to try to create warmth. She passed a torch every now and then, but mostly it was dark in the dungeons. This wasn't a place many students visited so there was not a need for much light like they had on the upper levels. She pulled out her wand and lit it with a quick Lumos and realized she had never been in his part of the castle before.

She was somewhere deep in the dungeons based on the empty cells the lined the walls. She hadn't even known Hogwarts had actual cells, but it made sense when she thought about it. Shuddering at the thought of what might have occurred in them centuries before Hermione tried to get her bearings so she could start to find her way out of these tunnel like corridors.

Hermione froze as she heard voices up ahead.

"You'd do anything for a bit of touch," someone said.

"What, like you wouldn't? Think you're better than me?" Another voice.

"I do, actually. I know quite a bit about the art of seduction," First voice again.

"Bet you do," second voice said softly. "Seen your Mother chew them up and spit them out, haven't you?"

"Don't you talk about my Mother!" First voice was angry now.

"Boys," A new voice. Hermione's ears pricked up. She knew that one. "Quiet." Strong, controlled, commanding.

"He's taken a shot at my Mother—" First voice said.

"I heard him, Blaise," Malfoy drawled. "And I'm not the only one."

They rounded the corner and Hermione was face to face with Malfoy, Zabini, and Nott.

She looked quickly between the three of them, but found herself caught in Malfoy's dark gaze.

"Well, well, well," Malfoy said in his affected voice. "What do we have here?"

"Malfoy," Hermione glared at him, glad she already had her wand out this time. "You're out after hours again."

"What can I say?" He shrugged. "I'm *bad*," he teased.

Zabini laughed darkly behind him.

"What's a Mudblood like you doing down here?" Nott asked.

"Minding my own business," Hermione snapped. "You should try it."

Malfoy laughed, his shoulders shaking. "She's fiery," he said with a smirk. His grey eyes fell back on her and Hermione felt a strange urge to return his smile. She ignored it.

Nott bristled beside him. "Better watch where you're going," he muttered. "Lots of nasty things lurking down here."

"And I suppose you think you're one of them?" Hermione snapped back. "Not likely."

Nott's dark brow fell heavily over his eyes as he quickly moved past her, continuing down the corridor. Zabini glanced from Malfoy to Hermione, neither of whom looked like they had any intention of moving and followed after Nott, glancing behind him at the pair left.

Malfoy waited until they were out of earshot before he cocked his head to the side.

"Once was a fluke. Twice was coincidence. Three times?" He shook his head. "What are you playing at, Granger?"

"Me?" Hermione choked. "It's you who are messing with me!"

"Not yet," Malfoy smirked again.

"Yes! See that's exactly what I'm talking about!" She shouted. "You're so vague and mysterious, aren't you? Well, I'm not interested in figuring you out so just stay out of my way!"

"You're the one in my part of the castle," Malfoy said coolly.

"Yes, well..." Hermione paused. He raised an eyebrow, waiting for her.

“What? No witty retort? No quick comeback?” He scoffed. “You’re off your game, Granger.”

Hermione felt it. She was. This whole situation had thrown her off. She had her routine. She had her schedule. She kept to it and the world kept spinning. But now, she was dodging emotions and avoiding responsibilities and the world was spinning too quickly for her to hold on.

“Or maybe you’re just not that fun to play with,” she spat.

Malfoy actually looked impressed for a moment and Hermione felt a surge of pride.

“Oh trust me, Granger,” He shifted and was somehow close to her again. “If you knew the truth, you wouldn’t be saying that.”

“Really? Then why does no girl stay around you for more than two weeks? Oh, except Pansy, of course, but she’s never had good taste anyways.”

Malfoy laughed. Hermione glared at him. Why was he always laughing at her like she was some sort of silly child?

“Maybe because they just aren’t... my cup of tea,” he offered.

“Don’t you prefer fire whisky?” she grumbled.

When she brought her eyes back up to his face she was surprised at the look there. Hunger.

Maybe she didn’t like it when she could read his expressions, after all.

“Are you offering?” he didn’t sound like he was joking, but he must be. There was no way that Malfoy would ever say something like that and be serious about it.

“Isn’t the mere thought of a Mudblood too disgusting? Even for you?” Hermione glared at him.

Malfoy licked his lips and let a small smirk on them. “Maybe I want to see just how dirty you can get, Granger.”

Hermione hesitated. This wasn’t what she did. She didn’t flirt with dangerous Slytherins in dark corridors. She didn’t entertain the likes of Draco Malfoy. He had bullied her, he had insulted her, he had threatened her! Just days ago he had threatened her for touching him and now...

“I...” she stumbled on her words.

“Look at you,” Malfoy’s smug smirk spread. “You’re blushing.”

Hermione didn’t like that she was having a reaction to him and she liked even less that he was seeing it.

Malfoy reached up and his hand hovered over her cheek. She felt her skin react, tensing, but also... excited for the prospect of being touched. And not just touched, but touched by Malfoy.

“The only dirty thing about you is your blood,” he murmured and she wasn’t sure if he had meant to say it out loud. “Everything else is...” He sucked in a breath and for some unknown

reason; she was waiting for him to finish. “Pure,” he said, barely above a whisper.

So she was going mad. That was the only explanation as to why she was down here in the dungeons doing whatever this was with Draco Malfoy instead of warm and safe up in Gryffindor tower with her friends. Or was it?

“Maybe not,” she breathed out and he blinked his storm grey eyes in surprise.

“Oh *fuck*,” he muttered.

His hand closed on her face. It was strong, surprisingly strong, and it pulled her towards him.

His other hand grabbed her upper arm, yanking her closer to him. If she thought his hand was strong that was nothing compared to the power she felt in his arm. He could have thrown her around like a rag doll if he wanted. Instead he pulled her against his chest.

His lips crashed onto hers. They were soft, but hard. Practiced, yet urgent. But still controlled. Everything about him felt in control and she felt in his control too. Before she knew what was happening, Hermione was already kissing him back.

Malfoy growled as her lips moved against his and his grip on her tightened. He wound his hand around her neck and into her hair, placing her head in the perfect position for him to continue his assault on her lips.

She let out a small moan, which passed from her lips into his mouth. This seemed to break the spell because he pulled her back from him. His expression was unreadable again and Hermione could do nothing except hang in his grasp and gasp for air.

“You’re filthy,” he said. She expected this to be followed up with some rude retort on how easy it was to get her riled up, but she had not been expecting for Malfoy to say, “I fucking love it.”

Hermione flung herself back from him. What was this? What was he doing? What was *she* doing?! She had just let Malfoy kiss her! More than that, she had kissed him *back*!

She touched her lips gently. They were wet and swollen. Malfoy’s eyes watched her fingers and she lightly moved them over her mouth.

He took a heavy step towards her and for the third time that night, Hermione fled.

3. three

Chapter 3

Hermione did her best to just ignore him. There really wasn't any other option at this point. She couldn't tell Harry or Ron. She couldn't even tell Ginny. Briefly she thought about trying to discuss it with Luna, but then wasn't sure if the Ravenclaw would be able to offer much advice to her. Plus, she wasn't sure she wanted anyone to know. This wasn't exactly something she was proud of.

It had been Draco Malfoy who kissed her after all. This wasn't just a boy and that hadn't been just a kiss... There had been something else in it, a darkness that Hermione wasn't sure what to do with. It scared her, to be honest. But it also... intrigued her. And she wasn't sure if that fact was even scarier.

She had shared a few kisses with Viktor years before, but they had been simple and chaste. And with her being so nervous and him being a little clumsy, none of them had been impressive. She was inexperienced to say the least and Malfoy had his reputation for a reason. She stroked the purring cat on her lap and flipped the page of the book she was pretending to read while she thought all of this over.

"You need to move your eyes," Ginny threw herself down in a chair across from Hermione. "If you're going to sit there and act like you're reading, you need to move your eyes every now and then. Fred and George taught me that."

Hermione couldn't help but smile a little as she closed the book and set it down. She had made more of an effort to spend time in the common room over the past few days despite Ron and Lavender's growing public displays of affection. She had missed hanging out with Ginny and Harry and she had also missed Crookshanks. The ginger cat purred loudly as if letting her know he had missed her too.

Plus, it was the perfect place to make sure she didn't run into a certain blond Slytherin. Even if she still spent most of her time thinking about him. She scratched Crookshanks on the head and he closed his golden eyes happily.

"Any luck on finding a date for Slughorn's party?" Ginny asked offhandedly.

With a sigh Hermione shook her head. "No, but then again, I haven't really been looking."

"Do you want me to help?" Ginny leaned forward. "I can ask Dean who is still available and—"

"No, it's okay," Hermione mumbled and glanced over at Ron and Lavender snuggled up close to the fire. She had given Ronald a bit of thought as well. His current actions and what he had said to her after his practice had changed things. If he really felt that way then there was no way the two of them would have worked out. And as much as it hurt, Hermione was

starting to heal from his betrayal of her. Unfortunately, she wasn't having as much luck with her thoughts about Malfoy.

She still thought it might all be an elaborate ruse to humiliate her, but why would he sully himself in the process? Malfoy saw people like her as filthy, dirty, and disgusting. Would it be worth tarnishing his own image just to ruin hers? It didn't make sense.

"Wait... I know that look!" Ginny grinned. Hermione looked up. "There's someone you're thinking of asking!" She said happily.

"What? No," Hermione shook her head again and her curly brown hair fell around her face. "No there isn't."

"You get this far away look in your eyes and then you bite your lip," Ginny's smile spread. "I know boy thoughts when I see them, trust me."

Hermione tried to keep the blush in her cheeks to a minimum. Yes she was thinking of a boy, but not like that. But... sometimes... she couldn't help but let her mind wander to the thought of what if he had kissed her simply because he had wanted to kiss her? He still insulted her, but there had just been this... feeling she got that there was something more to it. She wished she could find a book on decoding Pureblood Slytherins' ulterior motives.

"I was thinking about my Ancient Runes essay," She said, trying to deflect the conversation. "In fact, I need to go to the Library and get a few books to finish it."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "You know, you could have one night of fun instead of always running to the Library."

"But the Library is fun," Hermione frowned.

Ginny laughed and patted her arm. "Hermione, you know I love you, but you need to let loose every now and then. I know that marks and essays are important to you and I love you for that, I really do, but," She sighed. "I want you to enjoy yourself too. Merlin knows we all need it these days."

It was true; Hermione spent much of her free time reading about attacks, incidents, and disappearances in the Daily Prophet and her well organized mind committed them all to memory. Every name, every detail. Sometimes when she couldn't get her brain to quiet down, it was overwhelming.

"You're right, Gin," Hermione conceded. 'And I will. I'll find a date for Slughorn's party and we will have a great time that night.' Ginny brightened and Hermione heard Lavender's giggles from across the room followed by playful growling from Ron. "But right now, I need to go get those books."

She had finished the Ancient Runes essay two days ago, but Ginny didn't know that. Hermione did feel a bit guilty misleading her, but she needed to get out of the common room for just a little while and the brisk winter air in the dark corridors always helped her clear her mind.

The door to the Library creaked open and she slipped inside. She felt calmer in here, surrounded by the familiar stacks, books, and tomes she had come accustomed to in her years

at Hogwarts. Hermione took a deep breath, relishing the dusty scent of the old books and headed towards the Restricted Section again.

Although many of the books here send a chill down her spine, they did cover subjects of the dark arts that she didn't know much about. And with the war coming, she needed all the information she could get. The blue light candles hovered around the tops of the shelves and Hermione lit the tip of her wand to give her a little more light to see by.

"I was wondering when you'd be back," His drawling voice came as a shock to her and Hermione jumped with a yelp and dropped her wand. It rolled away somewhere, the light disappearing behind a stack. She was temporarily glad of the darkness so that Malfoy could not see the flush of her face.

"What are you doing?" She hissed, angry that he had snuck up on her yet again and even more angry that she had dropped her wand somewhere.

"Waiting for you to get past whatever qualms you have." His voice was like velvet and Hermione blinked in the darkness as his outline began to come into view.

"What are you talking about?" She huffed and tore her eyes from him, trying to find where her wand went.

Then she could feel him behind her. His hands ran down her arms and rested on her wrists. His chest brushed against her back and she could smell mint on his breath as it blew a few strands of her hair. She heard him chuckle a little behind her.

"Granger, you can't play dumb," He took a deep breath. "No one would believe it."

"If I didn't know you better I'd say you just paid me a compliment," Hermione snapped. She didn't know what Malfoy was doing, but she wasn't going to let him get the better of her this time.

"And how well do you know me, Granger?" His voice was deep and rumbled through her.

She spun around at this and his silver eyes trapped her in his gaze. The pale blue light above them cast what could have been interpreted as a halo around his white blond hair if she hadn't known him for the devil he was.

A smirk began to spread over his aristocratic features and Hermione realized that she had been staring. "Well enough," she snapped.

"You think so?" He raised an eyebrow. 'Because I think,' Malfoy shifted in front of her, leaning his weight to one side effortlessly. "We could get to know one another... better."

She shoved down the small thrill of excitement that tried to bubble up in her. This was Malfoy, she reminded herself. "And why would I want to do that?" She narrowed her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest.

He leaned in close to her. "No one has to know," he whispered and Hermione felt those words pass right through her. She felt her mouth fall open slightly and his rain grey eyes slid to it for a second before they came back to hold her gaze once more.

She couldn't figure out his game because there had been none. He wasn't trying to trick her or humiliate her at all. She couldn't believe it. It was impossible, but... here was the

proof, standing right in front of her.

“You can’t tell me you’ve never thought about it,” He whispered and reached up to play with a stray curl. “The... forbidden fruit.” His eyes slid down over her and back up again, bringing a smirk with them.

“But... you hate me,” She breathed out.

“Loathe you,” Malfoy said simply. ‘But that doesn’t mean that you aren’t fucking adorable.’ He licked his lips. “And adorably fuckable.”

She pulled away from him with a small gasp. Malfoy chuckled again, not bothered at all by her reaction. “I know you still think about that kiss,” He said huskily, dropping his eyes back to her lips again. “Because every time you accidentally look at me you bite your lip and —” He stopped and swallowed hard, trying to keep his composure. Once again everything about him came under his control. “And you should let me do that for you.”

Her mind was spinning. Finally, with him here in front of her, she was not able to deny the part of her that had enjoyed their kiss and even their other interactions. But this was wrong and she knew it. She should turn away, grab her wand, and continue ignoring him. And Hermione always did what she was supposed to. But Ginny had said that she needed to let loose and live a little...

“How do I know you wouldn’t go and tell everyone?” She countered. Why was she even entertaining this? It was madness! It was... exhilarating.

Malfoy cocked his head to the side. “You think I want people knowing?”

But his rejection didn’t sting like Ron’s had. In fact, in a strange way, it empowered her. Malfoy despised her, yet he still was interested in her; even if it was in just a physical way. But maybe that’s what she needed too.

She felt the weight of her thoughts and their quick movement was enough to make her dizzy. Or was that because Malfoy seemed to be getting closer to her again? Her heart was beating wildly in her chest. She was Hermione Granger and she didn’t do things like this. She bit her lip in thought.

Hermione heard the growl half a second before she felt him push her back into the books behind her, his hands finding her wrists and holding them at her sides. His nose grazed along hers and she could smell the mint in the heavy breaths that graced her lips every few seconds.

Hermione went still, her brain finally shutting up for the first time in days as Malfoy’s lips hovered less than an inch from hers. He moved his body against hers and once again she felt his solid muscles press into her.

“Do you want to kiss me, Granger?” Malfoy said in a low voice.

Yes. The answer was a simple yes, yet somehow it wasn’t. Malfoy had a long line of conquests left behind him and she didn’t want to just be another notch on his bedpost. But she wanted this. Wanted it in a way that was entirely different than the way she had wanted Ron. This was raw, primal, and real.

Just barely, she allowed her head to nod. She could practically feel the excitement run through his body and his grip on her wrists tightened. She tilted her face slightly up towards

him. She couldn't deny that she did want to kiss him again. Maybe the darkness had made her bolder, but she could think it all over in the morning sun. Tonight she just wanted to act.

"Ask nicely," Malfoy whispered. She felt a surge of Gryffindor pride rise up in her and her tawny eyes burned into his. Malfoy smirked. "You already got your free taste. Now you've got to earn it."

Oh, if he had said almost anything else other than that... Hermione had a competitive spirit that was almost unmatched. She didn't care that much for Quidditch. Of course she cheered on her house team at every game, but her competitiveness ran in a different streak. It is what drove her to be the top of her class, what drove her to strive hard. It was what made her pluck up her courage and say—

"Kiss me," she breathed out, excited by her own boldness.

Malfoy brushed his lips against hers and Hermione felt a shiver begin to travel down her spine. "I said nicely," He flicked his tongue against her bottom lip and squeezed her wrists just a little tighter.

Hermione felt herself grow warm with anticipation. As much as she didn't want to and as much as she didn't want to say it, she wanted to feel him kiss her even more. "Please," she managed, closing her eyes against the smug expression on his face.

It was rough, urgent, and full of need. Hermione felt lightheaded and was glad that Malfoy was holding onto her to keep her from slipping down the shelves. Malfoy pressed her harder into the dark books of the Restricted Section and engulfed her. Her whole body responded to him, tightening and pushing into him as her lips opened for him. Malfoy didn't waste any time letting his tongue snake inside her mouth and he tasted her fully. For a moment she worried that she wouldn't be able to match his skill, but a deep groan rose up in him and her worries slid from her mind as she focused back on him.

She knew her lips would be tender by his rough treatment of them, but she made no attempt to pull away. Malfoy seemed pleased at his and deepened the kiss to the point where Hermione began to feel like she was losing herself in it. He pressed his hips into hers and bit down on her bottom lip. Hard.

She whimpered slightly and he released it, pulling back only far enough to look down at her. They were both breathing rapidly and Hermione felt her chest press into his with each breath and was surprised by how much she liked the feeling.

"Sweet Salazar, I could eat you up," Malfoy said in a low voice.

She was at a loss for words. Part of her wondered what would happen if she said 'please' again, but she wasn't sure if she was ready to find out just yet. Her body was still vibrating from their kiss and the rational part of her brain wanted to think this all through before she got herself into anything else. Another part wanted Malfoy to do exactly what he had just said.

This was wrong. It might feel good, but something in her brain was screaming at her. This was Draco Malfoy for heaven's sake! There was a reason she hadn't told anyone about their late night run-ins. Malfoy's eyes shone like silver and in that moment she entirely believed

that he could consume her. And the worst part was there was a piece of her that wanted him to.

"I shouldn't be doing this," She mumbled.

Malfoy gave a soft snort. "Worried what Saint Potter will think?"

Hermione felt a bit of her fire return to her. "Yes, actually," she blinked. It wasn't just her that Malfoy had mercilessly teased over the years; it was Harry and Ron too, taking swipes at Ron's family and the fact that Harry didn't have one. "You're vile and cruel. And this, this is wrong."

The disappointment was clear on Malfoy's face for only a moment before he tucked it away behind a mask of indifference.

"Look Granger," He said in a bored tone. 'I've given you a few chances now. I like a chase, but I like the catch even better.' Hermione bit her lip to stifle a surprised gasp. "You can pretend you're better than this, but come on," Malfoy raised one eyebrow. "We both know you're not."

She was a little hurt by the venom in his tone. Would she ever be more than just a Mudblood to him? Did she even want to be? That was a question that she wasn't prepared to answer right now when the minty smell of him was drifting up her nose and making her brain feel fuzzy.

"You think I'm so low," Hermione narrowed her eyes, refusing to let him get the better of her this time. "But you're the one who is chasing me, not the other way around."

His expression turned unreadable for a moment, but she thought she might have been a glimmer of entertainment in his eyes as another candle drifted above them.

"I should fuck that attitude right out of you," He snapped, grey eyes as hard as iron.

She pulled away from him quickly. Merlin, where had her wand gotten to? She didn't want to pull her eyes away from him to search for it, but she desperately wished that it was in her hand.

Malfoy wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her against him in one swift movement. Hermione placed her hands on his chest, ready to push him back at a moment's notice, but had to fight the urge to ball his shirt into her fists.

"And I will, my little Mudblood," Malfoy's voice moved over her like velvet. "I'll have you begging for it."

She flung herself away from him and the indignity of what he was implying. Her caramel curls fell heavily into her face, obscuring it further in the darkness. "Has no one ever told you 'No' before?" Hermione retorted.

Malfoy smirked and she felt a twinge in her stomach at the sight of it. "No, they haven't."

"Well let me be the first," Hermione sneered at him. She took a few steps back and finally saw the tell tale light of her wand out of the corner of her eye. But she refused to run from him this time. He had already gotten her to ask him to kiss her, she wasn't going to let him run her out of the Library too.

Malfoy's smirk fell into a scowl. Hermione quickly scooped up her wand and with it a bit more courage. "Do you know how infuriating you are?" She said, her voice rising an octave in frustration.

"And do you know how self righteous you are?" Malfoy snapped back.

Hermione was taken aback for a moment. Harry had learned not to argue back with her by the end of third year and when she and Ron argued it was never a battle of wits. "Prancing around with your little friends," Malfoy sneered. "Doing Dumbledore's bidding."

"You leave them out of this," Hermione said firmly.

"Gladly," Malfoy glared at her. "This is between you and me, no one else, got it?" He said in a menacing tone.

Hermione wasn't going to tell anyone. She didn't want this getting out any more than he did. They both had reputations to protect, but she wasn't going to be the one walking out of here with her pride bruised. "There is nothing between us," she snarled.

Malfoy glared at her. He took a few steps forward until he was right in her face, her wand digging into his chest and she knew it must be painful although he didn't let an ounce of it show on his face.

"Bullshit."

Hermione didn't get the chance to retort before Malfoy had brushed past her and it wasn't long before she heard the slight creak of the gate of the Restricted Section opening and closing. It wasn't until after then that she allowed herself to release the breath she had been holding.

Stuck up bitch. Who did she think she was, talking to him like that? More proof of her poor breeding and boorish Muggle culture she was raised in. Draco stalked down the empty corridor, heading to the Room of Requirement. Two days had passed since their second meeting in the Restricted Section and Granger had not even had the decency to give him a sideways glance in the classes they shared.

He was infuriating? No, she was. Draco grimaced at his childish train of thought. But it was true! Granger drove him up the fucking wall. He had the best tutors before coming to Hogwarts. He had been raised to be the pinnacle of wizarding society standards and yet this dirty little Mudblood was the one who was the top of their class and it was she and her friends who were revered by everyone in school.

It didn't help that he was entranced by her too. She was unlike the girls he was used to. Most girls giggled and fawned over his attention and Pansy practically threw herself at him every chance she got, but Granger was different. She barely seemed to notice him unless he was insulting her and even then she normally had a witty retort that stopped him in his tracks. He had teased her, called her names, hoping to get a rise out of her just so he could see the burning fire in her cinnamon colored eyes.

There was no rightful reason why he enjoyed messing with her so much, at least, not one he was willing to acknowledge or admit. The girl was cute, yeah, but she was a Mudblood.

She obviously didn't spend hours in front of the mirror before she left her dorm yet somehow her bookish charms just worked for her. With her oversized sweaters and her messy curls that looked like she had just been taken for a tumble when the whole school knew damn well no one had made it in between her legs. Fucking prude.

But Draco felt himself drawn to her and her big doe eyes that were always diving into a book any chance she got. Her innocence, her purity, was something that called to him on a deep level, resonating somewhere in his lower stomach. He wanted to take it, own it, possess it. For years her blood status had held him back, but he wasn't able to push his urges away any more. And with the current threat looming over him, this year might be his last chance to have her.

And he would. There was no doubt in his mind that Hermione Granger would belong to him, if only for a night. His mind had wandered as to what was under her skirt too many times for him not to find out, at least once. Maybe after that, the spell she had wound around him would be broken and he would be free to continue on his mission uninhibited.

Draco pulled the dusty cloth off of the Vanishing Cabinet and let it fall to the floor. Until then, he would work and he would plot.

He would have her. One way or another.

Hermione was agitated all the next day. She was having trouble focusing on her classes and found that her thoughts kept drifting back to the previous night. He made her blood boil but she couldn't deny the attraction that she felt for him now. It hadn't been a fluke, like she had been trying to convince herself. She wanted Malfoy to kiss her again and she had enjoyed it. Too much.

Harry sat next to her, paging through his potions book, completely engrossed in it. This suited her find because he gave her time to think things over. She knew if she just put her mind to it, she could figure out what was causing her to have this reaction to Malfoy and then she could squash it.

But a deep part of her knew what was causing this— the fact that no matter how much she tried to ignore it and how much she didn't want it to be true, but she was drawn to the blond Slytherin in a way that she had never felt before. She could not stop the warm feeling settling deep within her anytime she let her thoughts linger on the kiss a little too long.

Hermione huffed. The common room was a pain to be in and now her one refuge, the Library, was also compromised. "I'm going for a walk," she said to Harry.

"Want me to come with you?" He offered.

Hermione hesitated. She would like the company and a walk would pull him from that awful Prince's potion book he was glued to these days. But it also meant that she would not be able to sit in her own head and process these thoughts and, dare she say it, feelings, she was having.

"It's okay," She stood up and gathered her things. "I just need some air."

"You know it's freezing out there," Harry said.

Hermione pulled her sweater on and pulled it around her. It was almost large enough to wrap around her twice. "It's okay, I'm a little warm already."

Harry glanced over at her, his green eyes questioning behind his round glasses. They had slipped down his nose a little from bending over his potions book. She always did have a pleasant heat under her skin and sometimes the cool air helped her calm down and think clearly. And that was exactly what she needed tonight.

"Okay," he shrugged a little and pushed his glasses back up his nose. Even after all these years they were still a little too big for him, but like everything Harry owned from the Muggle world, she was sure they were second hand. Something that Malfoy had made sure to point out multiple times.

Hermione hesitated and bit her lip as her best friend turned his attention back to the tiny black writing in the margins, tilting the book slightly to read it better. She should stay here and try to convince him to turn it back in, that's what a good friend would do.

She sighed. That is what she always did. She looked out for Harry and Ron; making sure they never got in too much trouble and making sure that their homework was done and turned in. Even though she was upset with Ronald, she worried that his marks would slip without her checking over his work for him. Oh well. He chose Lavender so she could be the one to proofread his essays. Hermione had better things to do now.

The winter air was crisp and chill and it lent itself to help her clear her head. Maybe she would walk down to Hagrid's for a cup of tea. But on second thought, she really just wanted to be alone right now. Hagrid would ask about Harry and she would worry about him and that book, and then ask about Ron and she would have to think about Ron and Lavender. Although she was working on getting over him, still, it took time. She hadn't just lost the boy she liked, she had lost a best friend too.

She picked her way down to the Lakeshore. The water was still and calm, a perfect mirror reflection of the overcast sky. Hermione looked up into the grey clouds and could have sworn they were the same stormy shade as Malfoy's eyes.

Why had he had such an effect on her? She didn't exactly hate him, she wasn't sure she had it in her to actually hate someone, but she did severely disliked him. So what did it mean that when she crawled into bed last night she ached at the thought of him?

Okay, so she was attracted to him. That was fine. Well, no it wasn't, but she could deal with that. Attraction was just physical and her mental capabilities could definitely overcome any physical desires she was having. He was enticing, she had to admit; he had lean muscles from his Seeker training and he held himself with a graceful arrogance. His cheeks had clear, sharp angles sloping down to a strong jawline and his indolent, uncaring attitude was like nothing she had ever encountered before.

And she secretly loved the way he had pushed and pulled her to fit his whims. His hands had been strong on her and his touches promised much more as he had held her wrists and pulled her head towards him. If only his personality wasn't so abrasive! Sliding insults in and reminding her how little he really thought of her. Well, at least he wasn't talking when his lips were on hers....

"Hey! Granger!"

Hermione spun around at the sound of a male voice behind her. She slipped on the rocks around the shore and threw out her arms as she felt herself begin to fall, hoping to miss the freezing water.

Gloved hands caught her and Hermione looked up through cocoa colored curls to see the tall form of Cormac McLaggen holding her steady. "Careful there, Granger," he said with an easy smile. "Don't want you to fall in, do we?"

Cormac helped her find her footing and left his hands on her just a few seconds longer than what was needed.

"Thanks," Hermione breathed out, taking a step away from the slippery shoreline.

"You're welcome," he said a bit smugly.

Hermione gave him a polite smile and tucked her hair behind her ear nervously.

"I wanted to ask you something," Cormac went on.

"Did you need help with some homework?" she offered quickly. It wasn't uncommon for other students to ask for her help, not just Harry and Ron. She groaned inwardly at how pathetic she must seem, brightening up talking about homework.

"No," Cormac flashed her a toothy smile. "I wanted to see if you were free for Slughorn's Christmas party."

"Oh," Hermione blinked. "Oh!" She said a little louder. This was perfect! If she picked Cormac as her date, that was sure to annoy Ron. Maybe even Malfoy would back off if he saw her there with another guy. She felt a rush of heat to her cheeks and knew she must be blushing furiously. Cormac's smug grin confirmed it.

"Actually I am," Hermione said as cheerily as she could. "Did you want to go? With me, I mean?" She let the words tumble from her quickly and they hung in the air as a cloud of vapor for a moment.

Cormac was looking extremely pleased with himself. "Yeah, thanks, Granger." He gave her another easy smile and Hermione tried her best to return it. He reached out and straightened her scarf a little. "So I'll meet you in the common room and we can go down together?"

"Sounds great," she smiled awkwardly at him as he gave a wink before heading back up to the castle.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief. At least she would be able to tell Ginny some good news tonight and she was sure that the younger witch would get a kick out of who she had chosen as her date. Her mind settled slightly at this and she decided to follow the same path Cormac had taken and head inside against the growing winter wind.

She did not notice the stormy grey eyes, or their smoldering glare, that followed her until she disappeared inside the castle and out of their view.

4. four

Chapter 4

She had gotten used to his dark gaze finding her between classes or in the Great Hall. For years it had been hateful and cruel, then it turned mischievous and with a glimmer of interest. But after their second run-in in the Restricted Section, Hermione saw a dark gleam in his stony eyes that she had never really seen there before.

If she was honest with herself, it had been a while that she had been noticing him. He had grown from a snarky little boy into quite a fit and good-looking young man over the years. And Hermione had watched as he had done so. She reminded herself that he was awful every time she had let her eyes rest on him just a little too long. This was *Malfoy*; it didn't matter if he was classically handsome with his pale blond hair and tall frame. He was a purist and she knew what that meant. Anyways, he seemed to remind her every chance he had gotten.

But things had changed between them and she had to be honest with herself about that too. He had admitted to... well, not having feelings for her, but having... an attraction to her? She still didn't know what exactly that meant though and his mask-like expression gave nothing away. Her own feelings were still a bit too jumbled to work out at the moment.

At least the talk of Slughorn's party was able to distract her from the thoughts of Malfoy that seemed to keep creeping into her brain. Ginny had been shocked that Hermione had agreed to go with Cormac McLaggen.

"I thought he annoyed you?" she asked, auburn brows furrowed.

"He does," Hermione answered. "But... well I needed a date and he was asking. Sort of. I guess I sort of asked him?" She shook her head a little. "I don't know, either way, we're going together."

"Well I'm glad you got a date," Ginny brightened up. "And one that's sure to bother Ron. I almost wish he was invited to the party so he could see you there with someone else."

Hermione opened her mouth to answer but was interrupted by Seamus who awkwardly cleared his throat.

"Uh, Hi Hermione," Seamus scratched the back of his head. Her coffee colored eyes turned up towards him and she noticed the book and crumpled parchment in his hand. "I was wondering if you could help me with a Herbology essay?" he asked nervously. "Ron said that you're really good with Fluxweed and Sneezewort..."

She stopped listening for a moment. Of course Ron would send his friends over to her for homework help. That's what she was good for right? Reliable, sturdy, dependable... Like an old boot. Hermione frowned.

"I've tried it myself, honest, Hermione," Seamus went on, thinking her dark expression was due to him. "But I need three pages and I can't find anything to fill the last one and I've been in the Library all evening—"

"Here," Hermione dove into her bag which always seemed to almost be splitting at the seams. In fact, she had placed so many charms on it over the years to stop it from tearing she was surprised that it still showed strain at all. "Chapter twelve of this covers Moly which counteracts a lot of the potions Fluxweed is used in. That should be enough to fill your last page. And when you're done I'll read over it for you if you'd like."

Seamus' face lit up as if he had just heard the Quidditch World Cup was being held tomorrow morning on the castle grounds. "Thank you!" he practically screamed. "I really owe you one, Hermione!"

She gave him a small smile and a shrug before turning back to Ginny, who was watching her carefully.

"What?" she asked at the younger witch's expression.

"Nothing." Ginny said quickly, shaking her head and making her long hair fall like a waterfall of polished bronze.

Hermione sunk back into her thoughts, not able to stay out of them for long. Ron was moving on, why couldn't she? He obviously just did not see her the way she wanted him to, had wanted him to... still wanted him to? She wasn't sure anymore and Malfoy's strange attention wasn't helping make the matters any clearer either.

She glanced around as Ginny flipped through a Quidditch magazine. Ron and Lavender were spending less time in the common room these days. Part of her was glad about this since now she could take refuge in here from a certain Slytherin who always seemed to find her in the halls, but another part was concerned. If they weren't here that meant they were in some secluded part of the castle doing Godric knew what.

But... so was she. Just no one knew about her illicit visits with the Slytherin Prince. Hermione took a deep breath and told herself all of that was over now though. She had just been weak from the emotional turmoil of seeing Ron and Lavender and that was all. It didn't matter that Malfoy had basically told her that he wanted her. She didn't want him and that was that.

She couldn't want him.

It wasn't possible.

But... It was.

Hermione looked over to Ginny wondering if she should tell her friend about Malfoy. Ginny hated him almost as much as Ron did and she wasn't sure how the youngest Weasley would react. She really didn't want another friend upset with her right now. Dean made his way over and sat next to Ginny, putting his arm around her but she only gave him a thin smile and returned back to her magazine.

Ever perceptive, Hermione noticed Harry not far from them looking up over the edge of his prized potions book with eyes a little more green than usual. She could try talking to

Harry... They had been friends for years and she knew he cared deeply about her. But she could practically hear him sounding off about how foolish she was wandering around late at night and then he would go into another rabbit hole conspiracy theory that Malfoy was a Death Eater again.

Hermione bit her lip. No, for right now she would have to hold her peace. Maybe this would all go away and she wouldn't have to deal with it anymore. Maybe Malfoy would get a hint when she went to Slughorn's party with Cormac. Maybe over the winter break he would turn his attention to someone else. Hermione allowed herself to be warmed by these thoughts.

But deep down, she knew that things were not over with Malfoy and her. Not by a long shot.

She did her best to look presentable, combing out her curls until they shone in the candlelight and slipped on the pink dress Ginny had helped her pick out. She twisted her lips to the side as she looked in the mirror and thought she didn't look half bad. Hermione grabbed a pin off the desk and tied a few curls away from her face and breathed out.

Ron was sitting with Lavender under his arm as she came downstairs. She couldn't help but be pleased with the wide look of surprise on his face and the fact that his eyes stayed locked onto her as she moved through the common room towards where Cormac was waiting by the portrait hole.

"Wow," Cormac muttered as she stopped in front of him. He looked nice himself in fine dress robes, but Hermione began to feel a bit uncomfortable as his eyes lingered too long on her chest. She glanced over to see Ron had twisted around and was watching her. Lavender was pulling at his shirt, trying to get his attention back. Hermione expected him to look angry with her choice of companion for the evening but was surprised by the hint of sadness she found instead.

"Shall we?" Hermione felt like her voice was too high, but she was nervous and fidgeted slightly before Cormac opened the door for her, leading her out of the common room and away from Ron.

They made their way down to Slughorn's office easily and Hermione was glad that Cormac was a talker because she honestly had not given much thought about what she would say to him tonight. As they entered the party she glanced around, telling herself that she was looking for friendly faces when deep down she knew she was looking for blond hair and grey eyes.

She pushed the thoughts of Malfoy from her mind and did her best to focus on what Cormac was saying. Hermione pressed her lips together. She had figured he would have moved on from the topic of Quidditch by now, but he started another story about how he saved a goal just in time as soon as he had finished the last.

Neville passed by her and Hermione interrupted Cormac to speak to him. "Oh, hi Neville!" She beamed.

"Hey, Hermione," Neville had always been very friendly with her and the guilt of not asking him hit her like a punch to the stomach. But if she was here with him Ron would know

it was just as friends. Cormac was the perfect cover. Almost.

“Would you like a drink?” he asked, pushing forward a tray of golden mead.

“Thanks!” She smiled and took one.

“Yeah, thanks, Longbottom,” Cormac reached over her for one. “Now, I was trying to cover all three hoops because I knew he was a fast bugger...”

She gave Neville a small wave as he moved on and tried to look interested in Cormac’s story. He didn’t really seem to care either way though; he was just enjoying recounting it for her.

“That’s nice,” she threw in as he waited for her to be impressed by what he had just said.

She took a few more minutes of it then excused herself. Just for a break. Hermione moved around the surprisingly crowded party and nodded her head at a few people, but couldn’t help but feeling a strange sense of anxiety fluttering around inside her. It wasn’t long before she realized that Malfoy was not present. She wasn’t all together surprised; Slughorn had not shown him the favoritism that Snape had. But she was surprised at the dropping sensation of disappointment that she felt when she realized that she would not be seeing him tonight.

“There you are,” Cormac’s long arm wrapped around her waist and held onto her firmly. “And look what you’ve found us.” He smiled and looked up above them.

Mistletoe.

Hermione saw it and realized exactly what Cormac had in mind as his hazel eyes drifted down to meet hers. She opened her mouth to tell him it was a mistake, but he captured her lips with his quickly.

His hands moved over her, running up and down her sides, learning her body’s shape quickly as he moved his lips a little too quickly. Hermione made a small noise in shock which only seemed to drive him on more. She tried to enjoy it. Cormac was attractive, he did well enough in classes, and maybe once he got tired of talking about Quidditch they could try and find something they had in common?

His kiss was very different than Malfoy’s had been. Cormac was moving his lips too fast to even enjoy it and his tongue was slipping and sliding against her closed mouth. Malfoy had been determined in his kiss. He had known what he wanted and he had taken it. Whereas Cormac seemed content to try and swallow her face, Malfoy had positioned her in a way where they both were able to enjoy their stolen moment.

Her lips paused. She shouldn’t have *enjoyed* that.

Cormac’s hand drifted down her back and rested in the small curve above her skirt, pressing in firmly and pushing their bodies closer together. She shouldn’t be thinking of Malfoy at a time like this. She shouldn’t be kissing Cormac like this either.

Hermione pulled away, pressing on his chest to push him back. He kept his eyes closed and reached for her again, lips still puckered to continue their kiss.

“Are you thirsty?” she gasped, taking in a quick breath.

“Huh?” Cormac slightly opened his eyes.

“I’m parched,” Hermione said and untangled herself from his arms. Cormac looked slightly put out as she ran her hands over her dress, straightening it out and looking around to see if anyone had just seen her snogging. A fifth year Hufflepuff gave her a hearty wink and Hermione quickly turned away. “I’ll get us some more drinks,” she offered quickly and slipped off before Cormac could protest.

It wasn’t long before she ran into Harry and Luna. She shouldn’t have been surprised at the fact that Harry was concerned about Ron and Quidditch, but he should have known better than to think she would say something to Ron to deliberately hurt him. She might be upset with him, but he was still one of her best friends. Once she had assured him that she had no plans to reveal her involvement at tryouts Harry seemed to relax a little. It made her feel a little better that he seemed to be having just a bad time as she was, however his choice of Luna for a date seemed to outshine her own.

As much as she would have been content to hide away with them for the evening as Harry looked about as uncomfortable as she felt, when she caught a glimpse of Cormac searching for her out of the corner of her eye she darted off again.

She was halfway across the room when she saw Malfoy being hauled in by Filch. His rain grey eyes were storming with anger as he glared around at the party goers. They paused on her though, locking in on her own cocoa colored ones and that odd expression flashed on his face for the smallest second before Filch shoved him in front of Slughorn.

“What’s going on here?” Cormac asked and slipped his arm around her waist again. Apparently he had no notion of personal space.

“Uhm,” Hermione shifted next to him uncomfortably. “It looks like Malfoy was caught trying to get into the party.”

“Tosser.” Cormac huffed.

Hermione blinked her large eyes and looked up at him. Cormac was glaring slightly at Malfoy who had just looked back their way. As he saw Cormac’s arm around Hermione his eyes hardened like iron and Hermione saw a muscle in his jaw clench. He stared at her with a dark gaze for a few moments before Snape hauled him out of the party and back into the darkened castle.

As Slughorn turned he saw the two of them and made a beeline for them. “Cormac! Hermione! So glad to see you both,” he said cheerily, cheeks a bit rosy from the mead. “What a lovely couple you two make.”

“Oh we’re not—” Hermione started.

Cormac pulled her closer to him. “Why thank you, Sir. I do think so myself.” He gave a devoted smile to their Professor. “She’s quite the catch, but hard to hold onto. I seem to keep losing my date tonight.” He chuckled and placed a pressured hand on her waist.

“Well hold onto that one, my boy,” Slughorn nodded and raised his glass up a little. “She’s going straight to the top!”

Hermione gave Slughorn a thankful smile before he shuffled off to speak with more guests.

“Now, where were we?” Cormac turned towards her.

“Oh, uhm,” Hermione bit her lip as he stared down at her. Were all the boys getting taller or was she getting shorter? “I actually have to...” She tried to think quickly of something that could get her out of another snogging session. “Go to the Library.”

“What?” Cormac asked.

“Yes!” Hermione leaned into her excuse. “Seamus needed some help with a Herbology essay and I told him I would look it over. Sorry.” She said quickly and hurried out of the door.

“I thought I told you this was between you and me.”

Hermione felt herself get pushed from the side and shoved into a dark, unused classroom. She barely had time to gather herself before she heard the door slam behind her and looked up through her tossed curls to see Malfoy glaring back down at her.

“What are you talking about?” she gasped out and then Malfoy rushed her. He grabbed her shoulders and shoved her into a wall roughly, pinning her there under him as he chewed on the inside of his lip. She gazed up at him, lips parting to allow in a large gulp of air. Malfoy just stared back down at her as if he was trying to decide what to do with her.

“You went to the party with McLaggen?” he hissed, obviously displeased in her choice of date.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “And who would you have chosen for me to go with then?” she snapped back.

Malfoy paused and his hands on her shoulders twitched slightly. “I would have chosen for you to skip that fiasco,” he finally said. “And spend the night with me instead.” He pulled on a small curl, wrapping it around his long finger before he balled a fistful of her hair in his hand and pulled her head back.

“And why would I do that?” Hermione asked firmly, trying to keep her composure through the quick tug of pain as he tightened her hair in his fist. Why was she letting him do this?

Malfoy’s eyes glittered dangerously as he leaned down and whispered in her ear, “Because you want to.”

Hermione swallowed. She didn’t want to, but her body was responding to Malfoy in ways she had never really felt before. She hadn’t looked around for a friend at the party, she had looked for him. She hadn’t thought of Ron when Cormac was kissing her, but of Malfoy and the way he made her feel... How she wanted to feel again.

“And what if I do?” she breathed out.

Malfoy pulled back slightly, calculating eyes carefully searching her face.

“Granger...” he purred out her name and Hermione felt a shiver pass down her spine. “Do you have anything you want to ask me?”

There were a great many things she wanted to ask him. “*Why are you suddenly interested in me? Why won’t you leave me alone? Are you actually a Death Eater?*” But none of those were the thing she wanted to ask him right now.

He was going to make her say it just like he had made her ask for a kiss. Her Gryffindor pride roared in her chest, fighting against the urge to tell him to kiss her, to touch her. No one treated her like he did. Everyone just thought of her as a bookworm who never broke the rules. And maybe they were right, in a sense, but that wasn’t all she was. Ever since the first time in the Restricted Section, Hermione had been mulling it over in her mind that maybe... maybe Malfoy was right about her.

She looked deeply at him. Even in the low light she could see dark bags under his eyes and his skin, which had always had a tinge of pink, was shaded with grey. Normally he looked pristine, not even a single white blonde hair out of place and she was surprised to see him looking so worn.

Hermione reached up her hand and brushed it against his cheek lightly. Malfoy jerked back as if she had struck him. Her head fell forward slightly as he released his handful of her hair.

“S-sorry,” she muttered.

Malfoy blinked twice and his light brows pulled together slightly. “What are you doing?” he asked carefully.

Hermione swallowed. “I just... I wanted to...” she felt her cheeks flush with heat. Had this all been some terrible joke? Oh Godric, what had she done? “I thought you wanted me too...”

Malfoy lips were on hers before she even saw him move. His hand was back in her hair, holding her head in place so that he could explore her as he wished. His other hand landed on her hip, pressing her back into the wall again. Hermione brought her own hands up to rest on his biceps, finding the strength that lay there under his robes.

Something deep in her stirred, lifting its head and emboldened her to return his kiss with fervor. It was so different than Cormac earlier that Hermione was almost taken aback by how easily she seemed to melt into him. She wasn’t fighting this one or overthinking it. She was exploring it, letting those deep, dark desires that she had been denying rise up.

Malfoy tasted minty and Hermione couldn’t get enough of the feel of his lips against hers. He guided her through the kiss, yet pressing her for more. Hermione, who always made sure everyone else stayed in line, who was called bossy at least three times a week, who followed a set schedule and rules to a T, relaxed. Hermione let go and let Malfoy take charge.

She knew he could feel the change in her and suddenly his lips latched onto hers tighter; sucking, pulling, and nibbling at hers. Hermione dug her fingers into his arms, feeling the muscles flex under his robes as he strengthened his hold on her. He pushed her further into the wall, pressing his body close to hers so that there was no separation between their chests.

Malfoy’s hand moved down her side to her waist, gripping it tightly and squeezing it. Hermione tried to gasp for breath but he was all over her, everywhere at once and all she

could breathe in was him. Her body shivered pleasantly at his touch and Malfoy's hand drifted lower, pulling at the hem of her dress.

He dropped his lips to her neck and she instinctively rolled her head back to give him better access to the skin there. His mouth was warm and surprisingly soft against her flesh and she felt her eyes begin to close as he trailed urgent kisses from her jaw towards her ear. Hermione felt a flood of warmth pass through her and opened her eyes quickly.

"Malfoy," she gasped. "Malfoy wait—"

"I have," he growled into her ear, causing another shiver and more warmth to settle deep in her.

"No, I mean," Hermione paused as he resumed his ministrations on her neck, slowly bringing his lips back towards her face. "We need to set some rules first."

He pulled back and his grey eyes darkened like storm clouds. "The only rule you need to know is that *I* make the rules," Malfoy said in a low voice and leaned back down to capture her lips again.

But Hermione shoved her hands into his chest, keeping him at bay. "That doesn't work for me—"

Malfoy slid a hand over her skirt and in between her legs, pressing his palm against her. Hermione cried out.

"*Sounds* like it works for you," Malfoy smirked.

Hermione shoved her hands into Malfoy's chest and pushed him back a few more inches. His hand slipped from her chest as he chuckled darkly at her apparent affront. "This is exactly why I want to lay down some ground rules!"

Malfoy gave an annoyed sigh. "What sort of rules do you have in mind? Not that I am agreeing," he quickly added. "I'm merely curious to hear what you come up with." He removed his hands from her completely and took a few steps back then looked at her expectantly.

Hermione narrowed her eyes slightly. Malfoy was still as smug and arrogant as he'd ever been, even after he'd had his tongue down her throat. That was fine, if he was still going to be a prick she could still be bossy.

"No one can find out."

"Well that's obvious." He snorted and crossed his arms over his chest.

Hermione pursed her lips. "I mean we will have to be careful not to get caught."

Malfoy raised an eyebrow. "Oh, so you are planning on a repeat performance?" Hermione blushed. "No, no, I like where you're going with this Granger. Continue." He smirked at her.

"Did you think I'd just sleep with you right off the bat?"

"Didn't think we'd do much sleeping," Malfoy's smirk widened and his eyes travelled over her.

“If you’re going to be crass then you can forget about—”

Malfoy had her pinned to the wall again with his face inches from her own. “Trust me, I won’t forget this,” His voice moved over her like velvet. “And neither will you.” Hermione felt his hand trail along her cheek and jaw before he dropped it, running his fingers over her collarbone.

“I’m serious, Malfoy,” Hermione whispered, unable to conjure more of a voice. “I mean, I’ve never...”

Malfoy let out a low chuckle. “I know,” he murmured as his fingers trailed the skin along the neckline of her dress. “All in good time, my sweet Mudblood, all in good time.”

Hermione pushed his hand away as it reached the small gap between her breasts. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why not?” Malfoy sneered back at her as he grasped her breast through her dress and squeezed it in his hand. “That’s what you are.”

“And you’re a stuck up, spoiled purist whose head is so far up his own—”

“You really want to finish that sentence, Granger?” Malfoy growled, glowering down at her.

Hermione met his gaze and held it with her own fiery one. “Ass.”

Malfoy pinched her nipple hard enough to make her emit a small cry. Pleased with her reaction he adopted a smug look on his face. “My, my Granger, I didn’t even know you knew a dirty word, let alone would say one.”

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Malfoy,” she retorted.

“But I intend to find out,” he smirked again and his other hand reached down to start pulling at the skirt of her dress.

“Another rule,” Hermione quickly said, making Malfoy pause. She gathered her courage and her thoughts to voice her next requirement. “I know you are more... experienced than me —”

“That’s an understatement—”

“So if I tell you to stop or slow down—”

Malfoy pulled back. “Do you really think I wouldn’t?” He sounded almost surprised.

“I mean... I don’t know,” Hermione felt the creep of embarrassment edge into her.

“Granger,” Malfoy stated as if this was obvious. ‘You’ll come to learn what I like. I might tie you to the bed,’ Hermione stopped breathing. “But you’ll always have an out, if you want it.”

She wondered if he could hear her furious heartbeat because it was rushing through her ears like a herd of Hippogriffs right now. “Okay,” was all she mumbled.

“Any other rules?” Malfoy drawled, sounding bored at the prospect.

“What exactly did you mean I’ll come to learn what you like?” she asked carefully.

“Don’t worry,” Malfoy took a step closer to her. “I’ll show you.”

“What if I don’t like what you like?” Her voice was barely above a whisper.

“You will,” Malfoy said huskily as he lowered his head down towards hers. “Trust me.”

“I could *never* trust you.” Hermione whispered as his lips hovered above hers.

Malfoy raised one eyebrow and something hardened in his iron eyes for a moment. “Smart. Even for a—”

“I told you not to call me—”

His mouth latched onto hers, silencing her protests. She couldn’t deny the feeling of elation that rose up in her as his lips moved over hers once more, claiming them for his own. If what he liked was anything like the way he kissed, she knew he was right, she *would* like it.

Hermione pulled on the collar of his robes, bringing him closer to her again as she felt herself melt against him. Malfoy grabbed her under her backside and lifted her up easily, keeping his lips on her as he moved the pair of them over to a desk, setting her down on it with surprising gentleness.

His hands moved to her legs, prying them open and wedging himself inside until she could feel the hard length of him pressed against her. Hermione fought against the pooling sensation of warmth that slid down her spine and settled in between her legs, but it was no use. Malfoy replaced his groin with his hand and quickly pushed up the skirt of her dress.

His lips didn’t miss a beat as he hands worked on her body. He nipped at her lower lip harder and harder until Hermione worried it would bruise and lifted her chin up to gasp for air. Malfoy dropped his mouth to her neck once more as he wrapped his arm around her, spreading his hand over her back and holding her up against him. She was glad of this because she wasn’t sure she would be able to hold herself upright on the desk while his lips latched onto a sensitive spot at the base of her neck and his hand cupped her center, firmly pressing his palm against her.

Hermione couldn’t stop the small sound of pleasure that escaped past her lips. The emission of it seemed to drive Malfoy on and he lightly ran his fingers over her center, making Hermione shake slightly as she reached up and held onto his shoulders.

“Malfoy, I meant what I said about tonight,” Hermione felt compelled to restate her intentions, although her body begged her not to make him stop.

“I heard you,” Malfoy murmured into her ear. “But you’ll like this.” His lips grazed the shell of her ear and she didn’t have it in her to push his hand away.

Hermione tightened her hold on his shoulders and Malfoy hooked his fingers into her knickers and slowly pulled them to her knees. He brushed his fingers over her inner thigh on his way back up. Softly he ran the pads of his fingers over her fold and Hermione’s hands shook upon him.

“You like that?” Malfoy said huskily. ‘Like how I make you feel?’ Hermione bit her lip and allowed her lids to begin to close when his hand pulled a fist full of her hair again.

“When I ask you a question,” He said with a bit of a growl in his deep voice. “You answer.”

Her tawny eyes opened instantly and locked onto his misty grey ones. Malfoy’s face was set sternly and although there were dark circles under his eyes he still had an air of authority around him. “Yes,” she breathed out.

Malfoy’s finger slipped inside her fold and Hermione gasped as a crooked smile crept onto Malfoy’s features. She had never been touched like this before and only had allowed her own hand to drift between her legs a few times before this. His finger found a sensitive spot near the top and his smile widened as he brushed over it.

“Oh...” Hermione gasped and her mouth opened in a small O. He swirled his finger over it a few times, testing and teasing her. Hermione’s muscles tightened in her lower stomach and her hips jerked forward as if trying to entice his touch.

“Fucking hell, you’re soaked,” Malfoy murmured against her lips before pressing his mouth back on hers, synchronizing flicks of his tongue with the movement of his finger over her spot. Hermione felt each pass with a jolt of arousal that shot up her spine and into her head, clouding everything else from her mind but the feeling of Malfoy’s hand and mouth on her.

He switched his finger for his thumb and Hermione let out another small noise as she felt him slide his finger lower and tease another sensitive spot of her center. He pushed on her lower back with his other hand, shifting her slightly on the desk and then she felt his finger slide inside of her.

“Malfoy!” Hermione gasped.

His response was a low chuckle. “Just wait.” He smirked and worked his finger in and out of her slowly as he moved his thumb lazily over her. Hermione swallowed and looked up to see him watching her from hooded eyes. After a few moments, he slid a second finger in her and Hermione exhaled a shaky sigh.

He moved in her with a practiced pattern and speed, but adapted as her hips would give a twitch or her breath would catch in her throat. She recognized the look on his face as the same one she had seen in the Great Hall; he was studying her, learning what she liked and responding to it.

Her nails dug into him and she knew he would feel the pinch of them even through his robes. Her whole body was buzzing and her breathing was becoming labored. Malfoy’s movements quickened and Hermione found her hips beginning to move along with them, increasing the thrums of pleasure running through her.

She bit her lip as the feeling inside her escalated, rising up in her until she didn’t feel like she could control her own body anymore. Hermione leaned her head back, exposing her neck and letting her curls fall back over her shoulders.

“Look at me.” Malfoy ordered.

Hermione pulled her head back up, feeling a rush pass through it as she did to find Malfoy’s storm grey eyes locked onto her face. “Keep your eyes on me, Granger,” He said in a low voice. “I want to watch you.”

She felt her body starting to tremble as Malfoy curled his fingers inside her, moving them as he pulled and pushed them in and out of her. She couldn't hold back the moan or the tremors as pleasure roared from deep inside her, taking over her body, her nerves, her blood for a few long moments. She kept her eyes on Malfoy as best as she could, but her lids drifted low over her eyes and her vision waivered in and out of focus, making him blurry before he came back into sharp relief.

Her heart was still pounding as he crashed his lips onto hers again, stifling the breath she was trying to gulp down and replacing it with only him. Her hands moved up over the back of his neck and her fingers wound themselves in his pale blond hair. He pulled his hand away from her and Hermione gave a small gasp at the sensation of his fingers sliding from her.

Malfoy leaned back his usual smug expression drifting back onto his face. "I told you you'd like that."

She felt as if she was in shock. Her ears were ringing slightly and she looked away from Malfoy as quickly as she could. She had... done that before, to herself, but it had never been like *that*. Hermione began to pull her knickers back up but was stopped when Malfoy's hand landed on them. She glanced back up at him, a little nervous. Somehow, the dynamic between them seemed to have shifted in the past half hour.

"What's your rush?" he purred, grey eyes gleaming dangerously.

Hermione yanked her knickers the rest of the way up and slid off the desk to find her legs unstable underneath her. Malfoy reached out and steadied her, holding her up in his arms as easily as if she were made of parchment.

"I should get back," she muttered and tucked a loose curl behind her ear.

"Why? Afraid McLaggen will miss you?" Malfoy said dismissively and rolled his eyes.

"Not likely," Hermione muttered. "Hopefully my running out on him tonight was a hint that I'm not interested. Although, he has taken quite a few Quaffles to the head so..."

Malfoy let out a laugh. Hermione paused and glanced up at him. She had heard him laugh many times, but never quite like that.

"Funny," he mused.

"Thanks," Hermione said unsure if that was a proper response or not. The feeling returned to her legs and she tested them out with a small step. Malfoy let his hands drop from her. She could feel his gaze heavily on her, but made an effort not to look at him right now, instead pretending she was inspecting her dress for wrinkles.

Hermione shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to return the favor or not or what exactly Malfoy expected now.

"Granger," he said in a patronizing tone. "Why are you acting like a bowtruckle on a windy day?"

"I... I just..." Hermione stumbled over her words.

"I'm not going to throw you down and ravage you so you can calm down now." Malfoy rolled his eyes. "Tonight was... fun."

“Fun?”

“Fun.”

“So... you don’t want me to...” Hermione trailed off.

“There are many things I want you to do,” he said slyly. ‘And when we get back from break I’ll show you exactly what they are,’ Malfoy leaned in to her, “One by one.”

She was a little shocked at his willingness to wait weeks until they saw each other again, but she figured there were some things she would never understand about Draco Malfoy and right now, she had enough to puzzle through without trying to decode his hidden agenda.

“Have a good break, Granger.” Malfoy reached out and twirled one of her curls around his finger again. “And you have my permission to think of me if you get lonely.”

Hermione pulled back, slightly offended at his crudeness. Malfoy merely laughed at her expression. “I’ll uh,” he patted the bulge in the front of his trousers. “Be thinking of you too.” He gave her a cheeky wink.

Hermione took a few steps towards the door then turned and glanced over her shoulder. Malfoy was leaning back against the desk she had just been sitting on with his hands resting on both sides and a look of amusement on his features.

“Maybe I got what I needed. Maybe I won’t be back to you after break.” she said, wanting to wipe that look off his face. He looked much to pleased with himself right now.

Malfoy lifted his hand up and popped one of his fingers into his mouth, pulling it out slowly. “I’ve got you now, Granger, don’t you worry about that.” His voice was so low she barely heard it.

Hermione wrenched the door open and slammed it behind her, leaning against it until her heart stopped hammering in her chest. She felt reckless and out of control and the feeling unnerved her. But what bothered her the most was that Malfoy was completely and entirely right.

5. five

Chapter 5

Draco sat glumly at the dining table. His Mother was casting dark glances at him yet still he was unable to make the scowl on his face disappear. Illuminated by the candelabra in front of him, the shadows on his angled features were deep and dark. He felt a small twinge of guilt, knowing that he was not the only one who was sitting here miserably and glanced up to see his Mother's blue eyes slide off of him as she pushed some peas around on her plate.

He looked away quickly and his eyes landed on the empty chair at the head of the table. Normally his Father would be sitting there, sipping a glass of amber whisky or blood red wine to celebrate the evening. This year however, the empty chair only made Draco lose what little appetite he had left. His fork clattered against the dish as he let it fall.

"Draco," His Mother's voice sounded in the same tone she had talked to him with as a child. Draco rolled his eyes and avoided looking at her. Instead he stared blankly down into his plate of barely touched food. "Finish your food."

"I'm not hungry." Draco muttered and reached for the wine goblet in front of him.

"You need to eat, Darling," Narcissa continued.

"I said," Draco paused as the lip of the goblet rested against his lower lip. "I'm not hungry."

"You're looking thin," Narcissa's tone changed. "I'm worried about—"

"I'm not a child anymore, Mother!" He snapped and locked eyes with his Mother.

She jumped in her seat a little at his sudden outburst. Draco felt another twinge of guilt as hurt flashed briefly in her deep blue eyes. He took a long sip of the wine to drown it out.

"Don't pester the boy, Cissy," His Aunt's scratchy voice cut in.

"Don't tell me how to parent my son!" Narcissa retorted, turning towards her older sister.

Bellatrix, her husband Rodolphus, and his brother Rabastan were all guests in the Manor. Or at least, that is what his mother called them. The three escaped convicts were still in hiding from the Ministry and had taken refuge in the Malfoy ancestral home. He had never known his Aunt growing up, but had heard stories of her deeds and the years in Azkaban must have only antagonized her deteriorating mental frame as far as he could tell.

His Father had not been thrilled to offer them quarter, but had done so at his mother bequest. Without Lucius as the main power force in the house though, Bellatrix was pushing her limits and Draco could see then strained tension between his mother and her sister clearly across the table.

“—You’ve always babied him,” Bellatrix’s curt voice cut into his thoughts.

“How would you know?” Narcissa muttered darkly. “Not like you’ve been around.”

Bellatrix sat up straighter in her chair. “I was serving the Dark Lord!”

“You were serving a life sentence.” Narcissa’s mouth barely moved as she uttered the words.

The darker witch’s hands slammed down on the table, her charcoal eyes flickering with the reflection of the flames from the hearth.

“I’m not locked up anymore,” she hissed. “The Dark Lord freed *me*, yet...” she leaned forward towards her younger sister. “*Your* husband is spending Christmas Eve as a feast for the Dementors!”

Narcissa gasped loudly. The air seemed to freeze around the small group of what was left of Draco’s family in the oversized ornate room. Bellatrix sneered viciously seeing the hurt on her sister’s face.

“Don’t speak about my father,” Draco spat out.

Bellatrix’s dark eyes swiveled towards him and he saw the excitement in them as she spied a new victim. “Yes,” she drawled. “You certainly are your father’s son.” Her thick lip curled up, baring mottled teeth.

“That’s right.” Draco raised his chin and glared back at her.

A tense moment passed between them and Draco felt the eyes of the other members of the table darting back and forth between him and his Aunt, but he held fast, not letting his iron-grey eyes slip from hers.

“Enough of this,” Narcissa finally said firmly. “Draco if you’re not going to eat you may go to your room—”

“You can’t order me around like a child—”

“Bella, while you are in this house you will respect the Malfoy name,” she continued without missing a beat. “And all who bear it.”

Bellatrix huffed and rolled her eyes. “He’ll have to earn my respect if he wants it,” she muttered darkly then her dark eyes gleamed across the table at Draco once more. “We’ll know soon enough.”

“Yeah, you will,” Draco countered back and grit his teeth. He knew if he stayed at the table much longer there was an increased chance someone would pull out a wand and having no desire to keep company with them any longer, Draco pushed himself up from the table, grabbed the bottle of wine and stalked out of the dining room.

Malfoy Manor was a large house with a long foyer running down the middle of the first floor with spacious rooms coming off of it. Draco took a swig of wine from the bottle and made his way to the grand staircase that led to the private rooms. The hallway was lined with portraits of his ancestors, most of them drowsily nodding in their frames. Draco had always been a bit annoyed by his dead relatives’ flat eyes staring down at him or their condescending

opinions on trivial things, like his hair style or his footwear. He frowned as he passed by them, not liking the constant reminder of death that led him to his bedroom.

Tonight, thankfully, he slipped past most of them without their notice. He passed his father's study knowing the door was locked. His mother had closed it up the day his Father had been arrested and only opened it twice since then; once for the Ministry as they ruthlessly raided his house and the other when Draco had seen her coming out of it purely by chance. He had asked her if he could go in, but she merely shook her head and told him his Father would want it exactly how he left it when he returned. Lucius had never liked Draco interfering with his work and had often made it clear that he had no tolerance for Draco's presence in his study. In fact, he had not even requested to his only son before being taken to Azkaban. He had only wanted to see Narcissa. No one else.

If he returned that was, Draco thought darkly as he made his way farther down the hall. Not everyone survived Azkaban, even short sentences. They rarely allowed visitors on the small island so he had no way of knowing how his father was coping or if he was being taken care of. His mother was constantly sending requests to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to try and get them to reconsider letting her visit him, but they would not budge. High security prisoners were not allowed visitors in the first year and only once a year after that. Narcissa was outraged by this and Draco did his best to console her, assuring her that he wouldn't even be in there for a full year, that he would be home before she knew it.

She had just gulped down a shaky breath and stared at him with a strange expression in his deep blue eyes and fell into his arms, crying again.

He wasn't sure, if given the chance, if he would travel across the North Sea and face the dark cells of Azkaban to see his father again. Draco... admired his Father, in a way. He was raised to be the pride of Pureblood society and would have made any father proud, but Lucius was not any Father. He was stern, strict, and expected excellence at all times. When Draco came home at the end of his first year at Hogwarts and had failed to make the top mark in each of his classes, Lucius had not tried to hide his displeasure.

Instead Draco had hid the bruises.

Second year he had made the Quidditch team and could not have been more thrilled, but when his father had come to his first match and he had failed to beat Potter to the Snitch, Lucius had not even waited on the pitch for Draco to land. He had run into the stands, looking for his father, but was informed by Professor Snape that he had to leave on urgent business.

Snape was a talented liar, but Draco still knew the truth.

By third year, Draco had learned how to spin a web of convincing lies to keep his father from finding out things he preferred to remain hidden. When that hippogriff had slashed his arm the school notified his parents before he had a chance to stop them. When his father showed up, Draco told a tale of a blood thirsty beast so Lucius would not know that he had recklessly gotten hurt in order to show off. For the first time it seemed his father was taking his side and so Draco delved deeper, blaming their witless teacher Hagrid and Dumbledore to extension for giving him the position. Before he knew it, he was writing out a statement for the Ministry and his father was promising to have the beast's head stuffed and mounted.

That was the closest he ever felt to his father, trying to get an innocent creature killed and an idiot sacked. He didn't feel bad about that, not if it meant that his father stood tall at his side. He swore to himself that he would do better, be better; to make sure he would never let his father down again. Things had been good for a while between them. Lucius had always taken Draco hunting with him, fawning over his prized horses while Draco preferred training the hounds. It worked for them. His mother was thrilled that they had an activity to do together and although she fussed and worried over him, she never tried to stop him from going on hunts with his father.

But that had all changed at the end of his fourth year when the Dark Lord rose again and suddenly Lucius had no time for a son anymore. His attention shifted completely to serving his Master and in the small bit of free time he had, he only wanted to see his wife, locking himself away with her and ignoring Draco entirely for weeks at a time. He didn't even see him off when Draco returned to school for his fifth year and made him stay at school over Christmas break as to not interrupt his schedule of work, service, and Narcissa.

Blaise invited him to come to his house for the holidays, but Draco declined opting instead to lock himself up in the Slytherin common room and getting pissed with Theo and using Pansy as he pleased. After that, he made a habit of those activities every chance he got.

Draco had made it to the large double doors of his room and his hand landed heavily on the handle. The wine was starting to soak into his brain. He tumbled inside, slamming the door behind him. He chugged another few mouthfuls of the aged wine that probably cost more than most people's entire Christmas dinner and stumbled over to his bed, kicking off his shoes.

Draco both resented and respected his father. He knew the world they lived in was a harsh, cruel, and dark one. Lucius had clawed his way to a prominent position and Draco respected that about him. But his father had a tendency to turn that same ruthlessness on his own family. Draco had learned early on the valuable skill of keeping himself under control in order to avoid his father's wrath. His mother had helped him when he was young, teaching him how to stay calm, how to focus on his breathing when he felt upset. Anything to keep him from acting out and attracting Lucius' attention. Draco had gotten good at this over the years and was able to keep his face emotionless and relying on pristine self control to make himself into the son his father would be proud of.

But tonight was an exception. He turned the wine bottle up again and let the dark red liquid dribble over his chin slightly as he sucked it down. He had kept it all together for so long, he had to for his Mother. Narcissa had lost her composure for a while after Lucius was taken and screamed and threw herself on the dark marble floor, beating it with her fists. The house elves had taken her to her rooms and she had not come out for three days.

But Draco had taken it all in stride. He had not let his head fall an inch as he walked through Diagon Alley nor had he let his hand shake as he held out his arm in placement of his father's to his new Master. Draco sank onto the bed. He had traded an overbearing father for a Dark Lord. What was the difference really? They both required many of the same things of him; although his father had never given him an order to kill. Well, not a person. Lucius had blooded Draco on a hunting trip at the age of five.

He closed his eyes and let the world swirl sickly around him. If he could only reach out and grab something maybe it would stop spinning but it was gaining speed and momentum and would not slow down no matter how tightly he closed his eyes.

That's what his life would entail— murder. Either he would murder someone or be murdered in turn. It was his fate and there was nothing he could do about it. All his years of keeping himself under control meant nothing now that his entire world was spinning out from underneath him. He felt like he was being flung through space, far, far away from the warmth of the sun into the cold unfeeling darkness of the void.

He tipped the bottle back and drank down the last dregs of wine still in there, licking the cold glass for the last drop before letting the bottle clatter loudly onto the floor. Drinking helped. For the few hours he could drown himself in alcohol, the weight of his task did not lie so heavy on him. Well, everything was lighter underwater, Draco mused, chuckling to himself.

But there had been one other thing that he found that helped, not even a thing, but a person... No. A thing. Granger was *a thing*. Draco pressed his palms into his eyes. Granger was a *distraction*, nothing more. But he had never needed a distraction so badly in his life. Between his father, his mother, his aunt, his school work, his task, his Master, and his inevitable murderous conclusion Draco was at his breaking point.

But maybe it wasn't him that needed to be broken.

He was surprised to find that even a glance from her toffee brown eyes made something in him jump. A few words, even snapping ones, made his blood run a bit quicker. And Sweet Salazar touching her? *Fuck...*

He had barely made it back into the common room that night before he grabbed Pansy and pulled her down the stairs into his dorm with him, shoving her to her knees in front of him. Holding onto her head, he closed his eyes and made sure not to look down at her black hair, instead imaging running his fingers through thick caramel curls...

Draco threw one arm above his head and rested the other on his lower stomach. Any other night he would slide his hand further down and dive into his favorite fantasy of Granger bent over a table in the Library. He had stared at his hand for most of the trip back on the Hogwarts Express the day after. Gazing at it curiously. Strange that the fingers that curled inside her were only a few inches lower than the scorched mark on his arm that labeled him as her enemy.

Drunken thoughts swam lazily through his head. Was Granger a member of the Order? Did they take people that young? It didn't matter, he told himself, if she wasn't already, she would be soon. And the day might come where he faced her across a battlefield. Would that same hand hold the wand that cast a killing curse in her direction?

There had been a time where he would have been pleased to hear the news of Granger's demise. He hated her. She bested him at every subject, something his father had never forgiven him for. He had tried to torment and humiliate her, hoping it would drive away some of her talent, but nothing seemed to work. She just kept on glowing like the fucking sun.

But it had felt so good to bask in her warmth, her heat... Draco's eyes shot open and he stared up at the high ceiling. That's what he needed. He needed one good shag from her and

then he could put that distraction to rest. That's all he really wanted from her anyways. He might not be able to beat her marks in classes, but he could fuck the bitch.

And he would. It had almost started as a game, trying to get in the goody good's knickers because no one else was really a challenge anymore. The closest he had to challenge recently had been Cho Chang at the end of last year and the most challenging part of that was to try and catch her when she wasn't crying over either the boyfriend that died or the boyfriend that dumped her. Really, she had been easy pickings.

But Granger was different. She wasn't just for fun, she was... an experiment. She had a strange and willful pride that he was surprised to see in a Mudblood. His father had always said they were a slow, dull sort but then again Granger was not your average Mudblood, her marks in class showed that. It would be interesting to see how much it would take to break her. But more than that, he wanted to know how far he could push himself before he broke.

"Draco."

The sound of his name was muffled, distant, and soft. Draco had drifted far into the depths of his mind, chasing bouncing curls through dark stacks of books for the better part of the night.

"Draco."

There it was again. He screwed up his eyes as light penetrated through his closed lids, not even granting him the option of darkness anymore. He shifted under the duvet, turning on his side slightly towards the sound of his name. Draco pushed a few loose strands of pale blonde hair off of his face and was greeted with the deep blue eyes of his Mother staring down at him.

She held the empty wine bottle in her hands.

Draco pushed himself up to a sitting position on the bed. Or at least tried to. Halfway up his head began to pound mercilessly and he ended up grabbing it with one hand and leaning on the other's elbow to support himself.

"I thought you might want to come down for Christmas morning," Narcissa said in an oddly bland voice.

"Uh, yeah," Draco muttered.

"But that was five hours ago."

He opened one eye and glanced back at his Mother who was sitting on the edge of his bed.

"Oh."

There was a long pause in which Draco wasn't sure if he should try to explain himself or apologize. He opted for neither.

Narcissa gave a small sigh and set the wine bottle down on a mahogany table beside his bed.

"I suppose it doesn't matter," she said finally.

Draco faced the harsh light to watch her shoulders fall slightly.

"I, uhm," Draco pushed himself up successfully this time. "There should have been a present for you downstairs," he finished lamely.

"Yes, thank you." She forced a smile on her face. "Ashwinder skin?"

"Runespoor." Draco answered. "With puffskein lining." The gloves he had purchased for her had been extravagant, but without his father here this year, he had wanted to give her something special. Something that would give her Pureblood society friends something to talk about other than her Husband's fall from grace.

"Thank you," she said again.

"You're welcome."

Things between them had been uncomfortable, both dealing with their grief. He loved his mother, but recently he felt distant from her. At first he had thought it might have been the reappearance of her sister. Ever since Bellatrix had come back into his mother's life she had carried around a tension in her shoulders that anyone else would have missed, but Draco noticed daily. But deep down he knew it had nothing to do with his aunt. It was the mark on his arm.

He glanced down at it. Black, twisted, and scarred into his pale flesh. It had been months, yet still an eerie red bruise surrounded it as if it had not healed entirely. He felt the hair on the back of his arm raise slightly and looked up to see his mother staring down at it with him. Her ocean blue eyes poured into him for just a moment with all the words she couldn't say.

She knew what that mark meant better than most having seen it on her husband for years. She knew that it meant he wasn't her son anymore, not really. Now he was a servant for the Dark Lord. And if he failed, he would not be granted a sentence in Azkaban. Draco crossed his arms over his chest, hiding it from view.

"Dinner is at six," she said as she stood up. "I expect you will be able to make it downstairs by then?"

"Yes, Mother," Draco said. Good, that would give him a few hours to soak and sweat out the alcohol in a hot bath.

Narcissa picked up the wine bottle and replaced it with a rectangular package with a black ribbon on it.

"Happy Christmas, Draco," she said before turning and leaving him to his hangover.

Draco woke back up to a late afternoon sun shining in the long windows of his room. His mouth was unbearably dry and he tapped a crystal glass with the tip of his wand, muttering, "*Aguamenti*" and gulping down the water quickly, repeating this three times before he slaked his thirst.

He stumbled into the bath adjacent to his room and slipped out of his boxers before slipping into the scalding water. He watched his pale skin turn pink in the intense heat and hissed as his left arm dropped into the water. The skin there was still tender. He glared down at the mark for a moment, then leaned his head back and rested it against the cool marble of the bath and closed his eyes again.

Draco wrapped a robe around himself and walked back into his bedroom. The carpet was soft and plush under his feet and he shook his head, letting small drops of water spray from strings of his hair. The sun was beginning to set now and he knew he could not miss dinner tonight no matter how much he wanted to stay locked up here in his room. He flicked his wand and trousers, a shirt, and a fine robe flew from his wardrobe and laid themselves out on his bed in front of him. He began pulling at the tie on his robe when something caught his eye.

Picking up the present his Mother left on his bedside table earlier today, Draco turned it over in his hands a few times before pulling the black ribbon off of the wrappings. The paper fell away onto the floor and in his hands lay an old yet surprisingly well preserved book. It was bound in leather that may have one time been a shade of bright red, but now looked like dried rusted blood. In gold filigree the title read "*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*".

He knew this book well. It was a compendium of the Pureblood families written by Cantankerous Nott a few decades earlier. More than that, this was the copy that had resided on the shelf in his Father's study. Draco opened it and paged through it, reading names he knew by heart.

There was one name he knew would never grace the pages of such a book— Granger. His blood was as Pure as you could get, untainted by common Muggle filth. The same filth that she was full of. It should disgust him, but instead he could not deny just how curious he was about her. Someone who should be no better than the dirt on the bottom of his shoes had somehow clawed her way into his brain and had dug herself in.

Draco tossed the book onto his bed and dressed himself. Tonight he would make it through dinner, for his Mother's sake. He would hold his head up high, befitting the Malfoy name he now carried as the Master of the house. He would give the traditional toast and carve the roast beef and remind his guests that this was *Malfoy* Manor. Then much later, when he was back here and alone, he could think of her again.

He climbed the stairs slowly, each step heavy as he slowly made his way back upstairs. Dinner had been... trying. Tonight Bellatrix, Rodolphus, and Rabstan decided to celebrate and they all indulged a little too much in drink. His aunt's cackling laugh had echoed around the dining room and seemed to fill his head until he could hear nothing else.

Narcissa had tolerated them so Draco had done the same. It was the least he could do for her after storming out the previous night and missing Christmas morning. But when Rabastan had waved over a house elf and ordered it to bring another bottle of wine, Draco had given a small shake of his head and the house elf had disappeared quickly from their company.

"Nephew!" Bellatrix called from the bottom of the stairs and Draco's head turned over his shoulder. "Come back down here, I want to talk with you." She was smiling sickly, baring her

ruined teeth and Draco fought revulsion at the sight of them.

"It can wait until the morning," he said in a low voice. His Mother had already retired to her rooms and he didn't have the energy to put forth the effort to handle his aunt alone right now.

"He can't," she hissed and ran a long nailed finger up her left arm.

Draco sat stunned for a moment then blinked his eyes. "He hasn't called me. If he's summoned you I suggest you go. Now."

Bellatrix chuckled darkly and shook her head slowly making her dark curls fall into her face. Rodolphus and Rabastan appeared at her shoulders out of the darkness. They all wore strange expressions of excitement. Draco's hand twitched on the railing, readying himself in case he had to draw his wand.

"He already called me," she went on. 'And I, of course, rushed to his side.' She stuck her lips together in a sort of pout and nodded her head heavily. "He gave me a gift," she whispered. Draco's brows furrowed as he looked down on his extended family. "He said we can... have a little fun tonight." Draco watched her face carefully as the excitement on it turned to glee and her dark eyes gleamed. "I wanted to invite you along too."

He knew what this was; they were going out to terrorize some Muggles or something of the sort. It was almost disgusting how happy she was to do this. She enjoyed inflicting pain and terror in people in a way he had only ever seen in one other person— their Dark Lord. She really was his most faithful servant.

"I'm tired," he said. It was all he could offer right now.

"Draco," Bellatrix cooed and took a few steps up. 'It's tradition.' She pouted and stopped a couple steps short of him. Then she reached out those long nailed fingers and grazed them over his hand on the bannister. It twitched under her touch and he forced it to stay in place. "And you're one of us now."

Granite eyes locked onto obsidian ones. He could refuse. He could turn and walk into his room and lock the door. He could lie in bed and let his thoughts drift back to where he had left them earlier. Granger was waiting for him in the back of his mind.

Or he could follow Bellatrix back down the stairs and into the frozen black night. Would they think him weak if he did not go? Would the Dark Lord? Draco kept his breath steady. He wondered what his mother would say if she knew what her sister was offering him? But he wasn't a child anymore; he was one of them.

Bellatrix grinned.

"Goodbye, Mother." Draco kissed her cheek, gripping his leather bag in his hand.

"Please write soon," she said softly, blue eyes deep as she looked up at him. He had grown taller than her by his fourth year and now measured almost the same height as his father. He gave a flat smile and a quick nod. Draco had always hated goodbyes; they tended to get

drawn out and people gushed emotions over him, but he kept his cool, emotionless expression steady.

"I do wish you wouldn't stay at that..." she wrinkled her nose. "Awful inn."

"I told you, I have business there," Draco said simply. He wanted to stop into Borgin and Burke's before heading back to school for the second term and it would be easier to spend the night at the Leaky Cauldron than travel back to the Manor just to travel to London again tomorrow. Plus, he was eager to get away from his aunt and uncles. Every time he looked at them he saw what they had done that night... What *he* had done that night.

Narcissa straightened his coat. "Just like your Father," she whispered and when she looked up, Draco saw a few shining tears in her eyes.

"He'll be home soon," he said in a low voice, trying to comfort her. "Once I have completed my task the Dark Lord will set it all right again and it will be just like it was. Better, in fact."

A shadow passed over his mother's face, temporarily making her look much older than she was. She gripped his hand tightly for just a moment and he felt the intention behind it. He wanted to say more, but couldn't find the words.

"Please be careful."

The door creaked to a close behind him and Draco stepped out into the darkened street of Knockturn Alley. The air was biting cold here and he felt damp seeping into his clothes quickly. He pulled the collar of his coat around his face and hunched his shoulders slightly to conserve heat, taking long strides away from Borgin and Burke's.

His visit had gone surprisingly well. Mr. Borgin's eyes had gone wide when he saw Draco enter his shop and had promptly closed it, shutting the shades so the young Malfoy would have privacy. Draco had inspected the sister cabinet intensely. It was so similar to the one he had spent the last few months working on it was almost hard to believe they were different cabinets at all, but on closer inspection this one seemed to be in slightly better condition. It seemed that Mr. Borgin had been cleaning it at least which in this shop was nothing less than a miracle.

He turned down a side street and after a little while saw the glowing gold windows of Diagon Alley shining back at him. The shops still left open were getting ready to close and the shopkeepers were busily sweeping the floors or restocking goods so they could hurry home to their families. Many of the stores were boarded up and the apartments above vacant. Draco wandered alone through the twisted street. He almost winced at the offensively bright lights of Weasley Wizard Wheezes and glared back at it. Signs for "*You-No-Poo*" and Edible Dark Marks were plastered in the windows.

"You'll be sorry for that," he muttered under his breath and watched the small puff of white vapor glow distastefully, reflecting the orange light from the shop. He did not linger long and continued on down the almost empty street in the direction of the Magical Menagerie, which he could smell before he could see. Much to his surprise he saw a familiar

head of bushy curls walking out of it, waving happily back into the shop where the shopkeeper tapped the sign with his wand and the word 'Open' changed to "Closed".

Draco stood in place, stunned to see her here. Granger was tucking something inside her bag as she moved towards him. It wasn't until there were only a few feet apart that she looked up and saw him. Granger slid to a stop in front of him, doe eyes wide and little mouth open in a small O shape. Draco drank in the sight of her. She was wearing a thick striped sweater with a scarf tied around her neck. Her curls flared out from under her wool hat looking almost like they were trying to escape. He realized they had been standing in the middle of the street staring at each other for quite some time.

"Granger." Draco said almost as a greeting. He didn't realize how much her physical proximity would affect him this way. His blood rushed through his veins created an intoxicating heat that excited him. He did his best to remain still, hoping she didn't realize.

"Uhm, hi," she said in a small voice, wringing her gloved hands.

"Buying Potter a new collar?" he drawled, falling back on his old habit of teasing her when he couldn't think of anything clever to say.

She narrowed her eyes a little. "No."

"Maybe a leash for Weasley then," Draco commented.

Her cheeks flushed pink and he was quite sure it had nothing to do with the cold. Weasley. He'd hit a nerve.

"I was buying some treats for my cat," she said waspishly and Draco fought the smirk that tried to appear. The awkward tension had passed and they were back at each other. But not exactly in the way he wanted.

"You mean that furball that follows you around in the corridors is a pet?" he said snidely.

Granger crossed her arms over her chest and raised her chin. "His name," she enunciated clearly, "is Crookshanks."

Draco rolled his eyes as she continued to glare at him. He hated to admit it, but arguing with Granger was entertaining. The way she pressed her lips together, straightened her back, and shook her hair back let him know that deep down she must enjoy it too. Why else would she still be standing here?

"Are you just going to stand in my way all night or did you plan on fucking off?" He asked in a bored tone. Sweet Salazar, he loved that small look of shock on her face.

"Maybe you're in my way," she argued back, "Did you ever think about that?"

Draco took a step closer to her and could smell vanilla and cinnamon coming off of her. She smelled good enough to eat.

"No." He growled and watched her tawny eyes searching his and for a moment swore he saw a flicker of something in them. 'See, it's always my way.' Her breath floated in between them like a cloud and Draco wanted to inhale it. "So either *move* or come with me."

Granger paused, staring up at him with those big eyes he so desperately wanted to see looking up at him from his bed. His blood was still pumping quickly through him and he felt a rush of it to his groin.

"Where are you going?" she breathed out.

This time he couldn't stop the smirk. "Leaky."

"Oh." Granger said blinking. "Me too."

Draco leaned forward slightly. "Well isn't that interesting."

"Not really. I mean, it's the way back to Muggle London and plus, everyone visting stays... Oh." She blushed pink again and Draco wondered if her ass cheeks would turn that same color if he smacked them.

"Well Granger, I'm freezing my bollocks off out here and there's a warm booth at Leaky that's calling my name." *You'll be calling it too.* "So keep up."

Draco moved past her, careful not to let their arms touch. He wasn't going to touch her until he was good and ready. Until *she* was good and ready. And he was going to enjoy getting her there.

He heard her huff and then the sound of her footsteps following him all the way to the back door of the Leaky Cauldron.

He slid into the booth gracefully, shrugging his black coat off his shoulders and folding it beside him. The Leaky Cauldron was surprisingly empty. Normally the night before students were to return to Hogwarts from the holidays it was packed with families eager to beat the rush in the morning, but tonight the place was dank, dark, and deserted. A sign of the direction in which the world was heading.

Granger stood nervously in the middle of the pub, twisting her feet sideways as if unsure where she was supposed to go. He watched her through his pale lashes and could not deny he liked her nervous dance just a little more than he should have. Granger pulled her hat from her head and her curls spilled messily around her shoulders. She bit her bottom lip and those caramel colored eyes turned towards him. Another rush of blood straight to his groin and Draco shifted in his seat.

Her chest expanded with a large breath and then she made a beeline for his booth, quickly sat down, and glanced around to see if anyone noticed. Draco noticed her breathing was slightly faster than it normally was as she hastily pulled the scarf from around her neck and the gloves off her hands. They were almost shaking as she rested them on the table for a moment only to pull them back into her lap.

"I think we need to talk."

How he hated those words. She could have called him a purist piece of shit and he would have minded less. Pansy had often said that phrase to him and it was always followed by quite a bit of whining, sometimes tears, and rarely anything good.

“Talking is thirsty work,” Draco replied and waved his hand in the air to signal Tom, the barman. The old man shuffled to the end of the bar, throwing a rag over his shoulder.

“What can I get for you?” He asked a little too chipper for Draco’s taste. He was obviously starved for customers and eager to please them.

“Fire whisky.” Draco ordered and then glanced across the table to Granger, raising an eyebrow when she did not speak.

“Oh, uhm,” she fumbled with her hands, trying to pull some gold from her bag which was filled with cat treats and of course, books. “Just a Butterbeer, please.”

Draco nodded and waved his hand at Tom again and two glasses floated over to their table. “Don’t worry about it, Granger,” he muttered.

She frowned as her Butterbeer landed in front of her, a bit of it slopping over the side. She stared into the foam as Draco took a sip of the amber liquid and let it burn all the way down.

“What’s wrong?” he asked as he set his glass back down.

“You—” she stopped short, clearly choosing her words carefully. “You don’t have to buy my drink.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “It’s a drink, Granger, that’s all.”

She lifted her eyes back up to his and he saw the wary look in them. She didn’t trust him. She didn’t even like him. But again he saw the small flicker of something else pooled deep inside her.

“Look, if you don’t want it—”

“No! I mean,” Granger sighed. ‘Thank you.’ She finally said and took a small sip of the Butterbeer. “But this doesn’t... doesn’t mean anything.”

“Damn right.” Draco quipped. “I just didn’t want to wait on my drink because you couldn’t find your gold in a timely manner.”

Granger stared at him again and Draco let his face become a blank canvas. He wasn’t sure if he liked the way she seemed to be trying to read him. Or maybe it was that he liked it too much. He took another sip of his drink.

“Good.” She nodded. “Good, as long as we are both... on the same page.”

It would be easy to keep buying her drinks until he leaned across the table and told her to go upstairs with him. He bet she was a lightweight so he could probably have her undressed in under an hour...

“And that’s why I want to talk to you,” her voice cut into his thoughts.

“Is that *really* what you want to do to me?” he asked in a low voice, leaning forward slightly.

“Yes.” She said it firmly but he saw her hands shaking on the glass of Butterbeer. “I’ve had a lot of time to think over the holidays and, well, I think what happened... Well I don’t think it should happen again.”

“You think too much,” Draco replied simply and took another drink. He had been expecting this, but he’d gotten under her skirt once before. He could do it again.

“Maybe you don’t think enough,” she retorted. “Or maybe you just think with—” she nodded and her eyes cut to where his lap was under the table in a pointed glance.

“Is that what you thought about over the break?” Draco’s voice was deep and quiet and her chocolate eyes widened. “Did your hand feel as good as mine?”

She gasped like she was offended, but he saw the small blush that filled her face. She looked pretty like that. Is that what she would look like when he slid himself between her legs for the first time? He had to know.

“No—”

“No?” Draco raised an eyebrow.

“No, I mean,” Granger huffed and he saw her trying to pull herself back together. “I mean I didn’t...” Her cheeks blushed pink again.

“Liar.”

Granger stared at him until the blush crept up around her eyes and then took a long drink of Butterbeer.

“How’d you do it?” He leaned forward over the table. Oh this was interesting. This was very, *very* interesting.

“I hardly think that’s—”

“Which hand?” He glanced down at her hands holding the mug of Butterbeer on the table. The one on the handle tightened its grip. Draco glanced up to her face again and she dropped her eyes down to that same hand. He reached out and ran a finger over the back of it. “What did you touch first?”

“Malfoy—”

“I asked you a question, Granger,” he said with a bit of steel in his voice. “You remember what you do when asked a question, don’t you?”

Her eyelids fluttered for a second before she answered. “I...” she breathed out shakily. “I just... did what you did.”

Draco ran the tip of his finger down the length of hers. “Did you use this one?” he whispered.

Granger swallowed. “Yes.” she breathed out.

“And...” He repeated the action with the next finger. “This one?”

He could feel her skin heating up under his touch and her face was cherry red now. She nodded.

“How was it?” he asked huskily and felt his own skin heating up. The fire whisky was burning inside him and the heat spread through his blood, pumping quickly all in one direction.

“Good,” she said in a small voice.

“Good?” Draco pulled the two fingers off the mug and wrapped his hand around them. “But mine was better?”

She shifted in her seat and crossed her legs. As if that would keep him out.

“Different,” she breathed out.

“And what, uh, what did you think about while you had these,” he ran his thumb over her fingers. “Inside you?”

Her lips were parted and she was breathing heavily. He could only imagine how wet her knickers were at this point, but he’d find out soon enough.

“Just how it felt,” she said softly and watched his fingers move over hers.

“How *I* felt, you mean,” Draco purred. “How it felt when they were *my* fingers in you.”

She tucked a few curls behind her ear with her other hand. “Yes.”

“And what made you come?” Draco sucked on his bottom lip. He could feel his cock straining against his trousers, wanting to get to the girl in front of him. He was going to fuck the shit out of her. Just ravage her. He was going to—

“I didn’t.” She said plainly. “I—”

What?

“So you played with that sweet little pussy and didn’t even—”

Granger pulled her hand off the table and folded them in her lap again. Her eyes darkened as she stared at the drink on the table for a moment. “That isn’t going to happen again,” she started.

“Need me to finish you off?” Draco asked with a smirk.

“No—” Granger said firmly and opened her mouth to continue.

“Then will you finish me off because hearing about you fucking yourself has got me all hot and bothered.”

“Malfoy!”

“What? Don’t tell me you aren’t creaming yourself right now thinking about it.”

“Oh my goodness!” She grabbed her scarf and gloves off of the seat. “This was a mistake. All of it was. I’m leaving.”

She was halfway up when Draco growled, “Like Hell.” Jumping up, blocked her from rising from the booth. The fact that her head was now level with his waist was just a bonus. Granger’s gaze fell to his trousers and the sharp outline there. “Sit your ass back down.”

Granger sat back down. *Interesting*. Draco lowered himself into the booth next to her. He could smell the same vanilla and cinnamon he had before and let his chest expand with it before stretching his arm out around the back of the seat. “Now,” he leaned forward and

Granger stiffened as he neared her, grabbing his fire whisky from the other side of the table and dragging it in front of him. "Finish your Butterbeer."

"I don't want it." She answered back.

"Don't be rude—"

"Rude?" Granger exclaimed. "You're the one who—"

He placed his hand on her knee and gripped it. He felt her body freeze in place and took another sip of his fire whisky before leaning in close to her. "I'm the one who made your pussy—"

He felt the tip of her wand poking him in the ribs. Draco glanced down to see her vine wood wand gripped tightly in her hand. He sighed and looked back up at her with a bored expression.

"It's wrong, Malfoy." Granger said, raising her chin. "You don't even like me."

"Who said that?"

"You did!"

"Oh come on, Granger," Draco didn't fancy having to chase her back down again. "That has nothing to do with—"

Her wand left his ribs and he felt it press into his already tight trousers.

"Watch it!" Draco jumped back. Granger shot him a nasty smile. He glared at her. She was right; he didn't like her. He fucking hated her. Hated her because no one else would have been clever enough to pull on a wand on him like that. "Be careful with that. You're going to want him in working order—"

"Shut up!" Granger hissed. "I don't! I don't want to do this anymore! I don't like..."

"What? What don't you like?" Draco leaned back closer to her again. "Because you liked everything that night."

Her eyes darkened with thoughts. "I don't like the way you make me feel."

"Yes," Draco purred and put his hand back on her leg. 'You do. In fact,' he moved his hand up higher onto her thigh. "I think you love it." He locked his rain grey eyes on hers and licked his lips. "I saw it in your eyes when I told you to sit back down. I saw it when I told you to answer my question. You *like* being told what to do."

Granger was shaking in front of him; obviously uneasy with the fact that they both knew he was right.

"Don't fight it," Draco pulled on a curl and let it bounce back up. "It's just the way you are."

"How... How do you know?" she asked shakily.

"Because, I know how I am and now I know why I could never get you out of my head." He pushed her hair over her shoulder and was greeted with another wave of the cinnamon

vanilla that was Hermione Granger. “You don’t have to worry about anything. I remember your ‘rules’. All you have to do, my little Mudblood, is exactly what I tell you to.”

She bit her lip and Draco remembered the sweet taste of them. She brought her eyes up to his and the flickering in them flared into a small flame.

Granger nodded.

“Good girl,” Draco smirked and ran his hand up a few more inches until he reached her hand. “Now, let’s see what this hand can do, hmm?” He pulled it forward and placed it on the bulge of his trousers.

“Malfoy!” Granger whispered fiercely.

“Shhh,” Draco moved her hand over him slowly. “You need to be quiet right now, okay? No one can see us back here, but if you keep making noise you’ll draw attention.”

Granger tried to glance around him, but the booth Draco had chosen was one tucked far in the back. He popped open the button on his trousers and pulled them open. Granger glanced down nervously and Draco chuckled. “It’s okay, go ahead and pull him out.”

The feeling of her skin against his flesh was almost enough to make him lose it. Draco hissed in a breath as she pulled his hard cock out under the table and held it in her hand. It was obvious that she had never done anything like this before, but he found her inexperience endearing. He grasped her hand in his and slid it up and down a few times, showing her how to please him.

“Just like this,” he said in a husky voice. “And—” He tightened her grip just slightly. “Yes,” he said in an almost groan as he leaned back.

Granger seemed entranced watching her hand move over him. She held him just like he showed her, keeping the same movement and measure. He liked watching her face almost as much as he liked watching her hand on him. Something was shining in her eyes and an expression of enthusiasm came onto her face.

“Little bit faster now,” he breathed out and Granger quickened her movements. ‘Ah, there’s a good girl.’ Draco rolled his head to the side and brushed his fingers through her hair. His muscles contracted and his chest began to rise and fall heavier as she stroked him pleurably. The fact that Hermione Granger was sitting here, taking orders on how to properly jerk him off was perhaps that most enticing thing about this whole experience. “Tighter.”

Once again Granger followed his order. He stretched his long legs out under the table and angled himself to give her more room. He could have busted right then and there, but wanted to make this last for as long as he could. He had fantasized about this girl more times than he could remember. The Mudblood who had always beat him... Draco smirked at the irony.

She glanced up at him with her tawny eyes and bit her lip. Draco’s cock twitched and he almost lost control. Granger’s hand stopped moving. “Keep going,” Draco groaned, needing her to go back to stroking him. She started again and he rested his head back and looked over at her again. She was clearly enjoying herself. She had that lip in between her teeth again and she squirmed in her seat. She smiled as she glanced back up at him and her tongue darted out to lick her lips.

“Oh fuck,” Draco muttered as he watched her pink tongue retreat back inside her sweet lips. Next time he would have that tongue running up and down his length. Next time he would have a fistful of her curls, pushing her head down onto him. Next time he would—

Draco bit back a groan as he shot himself out under the table. Granger’s hand kept moving and he pushed his hips up into it, releasing a few more times before he unclenched his fists and sighed heavily. His heartbeat sounded loudly in his ears. He felt like he had drunk the whole bottle of fire whisky, not just one glass. Slowly she stopped and the world came back around them.

A quick wave of his wand and the evidence vanished. Granger pulled her hand back into her own lap as Draco fastened his trousers back up.

“Come upstairs.”

“I can’t,” she almost sounded disappointed by this.

“Why not?” Draco frowned.

“Malfoy...” Granger sighed.

“Granger...” Draco raised an eyebrow.

“It’s late. I need to get home.”

“I know what you need.” Draco grabbed her hip and pulled her towards him.

She took in a deep breath. “Not tonight.”

It wasn’t a no, just a not tonight. He could work with that.

Draco breathed out and pulled his hand back to where it was resting on her knee again. With the other, he downed the rest of his fire whisky. He had waited this long, he could wait a little longer until they were back at school. Once she was in the castle again, she’d have no where to run off to. She’d be his.

“Drink your Butterbeer, Granger.” He caught the smallest of eye rolls in his peripheral vision. “It’ll keep you warm and it’s cold out there.”

Hermione collapsed onto her bed, mind racing with wild thoughts. Never, in her whole life, had she ever done something like that. She had gone down the trapdoor, helped Harry free Sirius, and fought Death Eaters at the Department of Mysteries, but she had never done that or anything close to it. Especially not with someone like Draco Malfoy.

She had done a lot of thinking over the past couple weeks at home. She had missed Harry and Ron terribly. Even though she was still angry with him, she missed Ron’s friendship. He had always made her laugh at unexpected things and things with Harry just weren’t the same without him around. She still didn’t think she could stand to be around him and Lavender, but she hoped eventually they would work something out. It was hard to accept that Ron might no longer be a part of her life. So many things were changing.

And if they could get back to how things were between them how could she ever explain what she had done with Malfoy? So she had decided to call an end to it. As much as she was attracted to him, it was not worth jeopardizing her friendships. But tonight... Godric, tonight...

He was right, after all. She did enjoy it when he told her what to do. More than enjoyed it, she reveled in it. For a few brief moments she didn't have to worry about anything, didn't have to plan, didn't have to think. Her legs had almost carried her upstairs and to his room as soon as he had mentioned it and only her quick mind had stopped her from following him past the point of no return.

Hermione bit her lip as she thought of the way he had felt in her hand; strong and thick. Without meaning to, she wondered how he would feel in her. Warmth spread down her spine and in between her legs. Clenching her thighs together, she rolled onto her back and stared up at the dark ceiling, resting her hands on her stomach, tapping her fingers against the back of her hand. The same hand that she had used on herself before.

She had laid in her bed, just like this, and when the thoughts of Malfoy wouldn't stop she had reached down, closing her eyes as she explored herself. But she had stopped when her mind suddenly took a sharp turn and she had a fleeting image of bright red hair and crystal blue eyes.

But again tonight her fingers drummed against her skin and slowly turned into caresses. She ran her fingers over her stomach to the band of her knickers. If she focused, she could still feel the warmth of him against her palm.

She had never done anything like what she had done tonight... And more than that, she wanted to do it again.

Hermione slid her hand underneath the band.

6. six

Chapter 6

The return to school meant the return of conflicting thoughts for Hermione. She had spent the greater part of her holidays trying to sort out her feelings and thoughts, but hadn't gotten much of anywhere until the night before they were to return to Hogwarts. The memory of it still sent off sparks inside of her; some nervous, some pleasant, but all burning.

She had sequestered herself away in a compartment on the Hogwarts Express and buried her face in her book, refusing to look up when she heard noises outside just in case she caught his eye. Or even worse, if he was there and didn't bother to look at her at all. Their night had ended on a strange note and she wasn't exactly sure where she stood with him. The only comforting thing was that Malfoy seemed just as keen as her to make sure no one found out about what they had done so at least she didn't have to worry about him telling all his mates. Hopefully.

She had been excited to see Harry and Ginny again when they returned. Ron was practically attacked by Lavender as soon as he stepped foot in the common room and Ginny had given Hermione a sad smile before heading over to sit with Dean. She made a mental note to ask Ginny why she looked so bored sitting next to her boyfriend when Malfoy's name caught her attention.

Harry's theory had grown and he seemed obsessed with the thought that Draco Malfoy was now a Death Eater. They debated the subject a little, Hermione carefully choosing her words about him and hoping Harry didn't notice the heat in her cheeks when he mentioned the night of Slughorn's party.

"I wish I knew where he went after that," Harry frowned and pushed his glasses up a little. "If he is working on something, I wish I knew where he was hiding it."

Hermione shifted nervously in her seat. She knew exactly where he had gone after he spoke with Snape and even though it might dissuade a bit of Harry's fervor, she held her tongue. Harry could never know. He hated Malfoy just as much as Ron did and his new conspiracy would surely make him think Hermione had gone insane if he knew what she had done.

"Hermione, what is it?" Harry asked leaning forward. "You look like you've seen a... well not a ghost, but something."

"Nothing," she said quickly. "It's nothing. Harry I really wish you would consider what everyone is telling you. I don't think Malfoy is—"

"Look, I know what I heard," Harry said firmly. "You might think it's crazy, but everyone thought I was crazy last year and I was right about that—"

"I didn't think you were crazy!" she said fiercely. "I stood by you then and I'm standing by you now, I just wish that you would listen to yourself."

"You'll see." Harry said, his green eyes sparkling. "You'll see, Hermione."

The first day of classes passed by fairly uneventfully. Everyone was excited about the prospect of apparition lessons and so it was easy to pass the day by, making small talk about what it might feel like with Neville as they walked from class to class. It was nice just chatting with him about everything and nothing. It seemed so much in her life was creating large amounts of stress, she hadn't realized how nice it was just to have a simple friend. It wasn't until they were leaving their last class of the day that she was confronted with reality again.

"Gran doesn't like apparating so I've never done side along," Neville said as they started to make their way down the stairs to the Great Hall. "We use Floo Powder mostly..."

Hermione felt a tug at her elbow and in the time it took her to spin around to see who it was, Malfoy was already hauling her backwards underneath a stairwell and out of sight. Neville's voice faded down the corridor.

"Hello Granger." Malfoy wore a smug smile. Normally an expression like that would make someone less attractive, but Malfoy's smirk only accentuated his jawline.

"That was rude. I was with a friend." She narrowed her eyes.

He rolled his eyes. "Who? Longbottom? You're better than that."

Hermione looked up at him, trying to pry her way past the smug look on his face. Had that been a compliment? He had done this before; said something nice about her but in a way that negated any kindness that might have been behind it.

"Who cares about him?" Malfoy took a step closer to her.

"I do, Neville is my—"

"I wanted to see you."

Her heart skipped a beat. She had wanted to see him too. She had tried not to think about him and keep herself busy, but there really wasn't any point to it now; they both knew their attraction to one another was obvious. Now it was just who was going to make the first move and of course it would have to be on Malfoy's terms.

"And you wanted to see me too." The smirk was back.

"What makes you think that?" she said softly, unable to make her voice any stronger. His scent was all around her; mint but also something else, something... familiar... Hermione tried to focus. Malfoy was very close to her now and he was creating a physical reaction in her. She just hoped he didn't know to what extent he affected her.

"Granger," Malfoy drawled and tilted his head to the side slightly. He reached up and twirled a curl around his finger. It was then that Hermione realized how quickly she was breathing. "If you want to play games, I've got a few in mind."

Her skin was tingling in anticipation, her blood pumping quickly underneath it. "I don't want to play games," she breathed out.

"Good." Malfoy grabbed the back of her neck and pulled her against him. Hermione gasped as she felt her body press into his. He looked down at her with storming eyes and she could feel the firmness of his chest against hers, heavy breathing causing their bodies to rise and fall against each other.

There was something about him, something about the way he held himself and the way he held her too, that made Hermione's mind quiet. It was as if the silver fog of his eyes rolled into her and filled her head. She knew she couldn't trust him, but the stillness he created in her was just as appetizing as he was.

"So, uh," Malfoy's tongue ran across his bottom lip. 'What do you want to do then?' Hermione pinched her lips together. It was bad enough she was willing to enter into this obscene arrangement, but saying the words was making it all too real. "And I require details," Malfoy whispered darkly, sending shivers down her body.

Suddenly she felt very nervous. She didn't know what to do with her hands, currently barely touching his sides. Everything seemed to be moving so fast between them and although a part of her, a large part, liked it, she was still in unfamiliar territory and Hermione was not used to being unprepared.

Malfoy must have picked up on this because he reached up and brushed a few loose curls away from her face. "So shy..." he murmured, trailing his finger down her neck. "So... sweet. I remember it well."

Hermione felt her blood rushing in hot bursts through her veins. Malfoy made her feel things, do things, she would never had thought herself capable of. Her lips parted just a little and short breaths raced over them as she stared up into his mist grey eyes, clouding over with undisguised desire.

"Tell me Granger," Malfoy purred, trailing his other hand down her back, resting it in the small curve near her waist. "Tell me how you want to get on your knees and—"

"Hermione?" Neville's voice sounded at the end of the corridor. Malfoy's head turned quickly in its direction and let out a low growl. "Where'd you go?"

Hermione held her breath, too afraid to exhale in case Neville was wandering close to their hiding spot under the stairs. Every muscle in her body tensed and cold fear replaced the hot blood pumping through her.

"Tell him to bugger off," Malfoy said in a low growl.

Hermione's brows pulled together in concern. If Neville found them how could she explain herself? Her quick mind searched for a reasonable excuse but surprisingly came up empty as to why she would be hidden under a stairwell in the arms of Draco Malfoy. She could feel her hands shaking when she pulled them up and gently pushed him away.

Malfoy's eyes hardened for just a moment before he cast a seething look over his shoulder where they could hear Neville's heavy footsteps getting closer. He turned back and pushed her further under the stairwell, his hands strong on her hips as his fingers dug into her.

Hermione quickly shook her head, causing her curls to bounce around her face wildly. She had her lips pinched together so tight it was almost painful. Malfoy tightened his own mouth and she could see him debating with himself as to what to do with her.

After a moment Malfoy took a step back and removed his hands from her, jaw clenched and a clearly annoyed expression on his face. Hermione breathed out a sigh of relief and started to move past him. Neville's footsteps were not far from them now and any second he could duck his head under the stairs in his search for her.

Hermione slid past Malfoy, brushing against him and causing another flare to travel through her. Without giving it much thought, she reached up and touched his cheek, turning his face slightly towards her and pressed her lips on the cool skin there.

As she landed back on her heels, she saw a look of confusion and something else she couldn't put her finger on in his eyes. She didn't have time to figure it out right now and Hermione ducked out from under the stairs, almost running into Neville. She had emerged just in time.

"Here I am!" she said brightly, taking a large breath in.

Neville stopped short. "Where'd you go?"

"Dropped my wand," Hermione laughed in what she hoped was a convincing tone. "Clumsy me, you know."

Neville had no reason to suspect she wasn't telling the truth and his face quickly warmed into a smile. "I know that feeling. Once I lost mine for a whole week!"

Hermione gave another high laugh and heard a small snort from under the stairs. She grabbed Neville's shoulders and turned him around. "Come on, let's get down to dinner."

"I almost cried when I thought I was going to have to write to Gran and ask for a new one," Neville went on. Of course he believed her, he had no reason not to. It's not like Hermione was known for sneaking around with strange Slytherin boys or that she had ever really lied to Neville before. Her heart was racing as she tried to put as much distance between herself and what lurked under the stairs as she could.

Hermione was halfway down the corridor when she glanced back. Malfoy was leaning against the stairs with his arms crossed over his chest. She expected to find an annoyed or angry expression on his face but was surprised when she found a crooked smile there instead. She took a breath and felt it's lightness fill her, rising up from deep within.

Malfoy kept his eyes on her but let them travel down her body and back up again before widening his smirk and throwing her a cheeky wink. Hermione quickly turned back around, focusing on each footstep, and begging her feet not to turn around and run back under the stairs with him.

Draco poured over his cauldron, the steam rising in a great billow blocking his view. He waved his hand, dispersing it into the cool air of the dungeon classroom. His antidote was a milky white color, close to what his copy of Advanced Potion Making described as the

perfect solution to the rich blue Mithridatum poison that he had selected from Slughorn's desk at the beginning of the lesson.

He was talented at potions, having gotten extra tips from Snape for years. As his Godfather, the dark haired wizard had often visited the Manor during his summer breaks and had given Draco a few lessons before starting Hogwarts so that he was well ahead of his peers from their first class period. The only exception to this rule was, of course, Granger.

He looked over the top of his cauldron to where she sat across the room with Potter, Weasley, and Macmillan. A strange feeling slithered around deep inside him. Her two best friends were male, she also kept company with Longbottom, another male, and of course there was her date with McLaggen. Although, Draco smirked to himself, he was sure that he had a better time with her that night than that idiot.

Still he didn't find the fact that she mostly kept male company endearing. He had seen her with the Weasley girl, but it was clear that Granger was not popular with the girls of Gryffindor. His thoughts traveled down dark paths in his mind as he wondered why that could be. She never seemed to have dated either Potter or Weasley. She had a fling with that buffoon, Viktor Krum, but he had paid special attention to their interactions and it never seemed anything more than an innocent crush.

But the way she had looked at Weasley sometimes had been very different than the small smiles she had shared with Krum. Draco glanced over at their table again. Weasley was sweating into his antidote, his freckled face red with frustration as he squinted down at his book. Draco felt his jaw clench as he watched the blood traitor measure out crushed doxy wings. And up until a few weeks ago, Weasley had returned her long looks when she wasn't watching.

Draco's silver eyes cut back down to the pages of his book. Why was he sitting here worrying about who Granger was talking to or not talking to? The only thing about Granger he should be worrying about was in between her legs. As long as she spread them for him, why should he care who she might have feelings for? Either way, as soon as he slid inside her he would clear out any thoughts she had for anyone else the same way he had brushed the steam away from his cauldron.

He quickly leaned over his antidote; he had spent too long in the dwelling on Granger and now his milky white solution had curdled into a lumpy grey mud-like substance.

"Time's UP!" Slughorn shouted cheerfully.

Draco groaned and ran his hand over his face. He sat back down and waited for Slughorn's disapproving stare.

His mist-grey eyes glared across the darkened classroom at Granger as Slughorn praised her antidote. She beamed widely, toffee brown eyes shining with pride. There was a slight glisten to her skin from her hard work and the light reflected from the shimmering liquid of her potion made it look like she was glowing from within. Draco suddenly felt the corners of his mouth trying to turn up to match the bright smile she had. Quickly, he scowled and stared back down into the ruined potion in front of him.

Granger. This was all her fault. She had fucked him and not at all in the way he wanted. He would have to remedy that.

Hermione yawned and blinked her eyes against the bright light of the Library lamp shining next to her. She had been researching Horcruxes ever since Harry had pulled her aside and told her about his latest lesson with Dumbledore. She had never encountered a topic where the Hogwarts Library had failed her before and refused to believe she wouldn't find the answers she was looking for.

At least this latest project gave her a legitimate excuse to avoid the common room. Although Ron seemed to be spending more time with Harry instead of Lavender lately, it did not stop their very public displays of affection from happening only ten feet away from her favorite reading chair by the window.

Another perk of spending so much time in the Library was that it increased the chances of her running into Malfoy again. She flipped the page and began reading when she realized she hadn't absorbed any of the information on the last page because she had been thinking of him again. It was impossible to keep him off her mind now. When she walked down the corridors she imagined him watching her and more often than not she found out that she was indeed right. His stormy grey eyes would lift from some part of her body to meet her own and that strange expression she could never quite read would be covering his face like a mask.

Part of her was a little worried someone else might notice his long gazes in her direction, but she reminded herself how absurd the thought of Malfoy wanting anything to do with her was to even herself just a few weeks ago. And the fact that she might return that attraction was just laughable. Their secret was safe.

But was this safe? Was getting involved with Malfoy, a son of a Death Eater and a potential Death Eater himself, according to Harry at least, a good idea? Of course it wasn't. She was a smart girl, despite her recent decisions, and she knew what the consequences of her actions might be. Her reputation could be tarnished by any random hook up, but the fact that it was Malfoy she was letting...

What was she letting him do? What would she be willing to let him do to her? She had thought over this ever since they had gotten back to school. Normally she wouldn't have done any of these things with anyone if she wasn't in a loving relationship with them, but all her rules seemed to fly out the window whenever Malfoy was near. Hermione was always in control, always had a plan, but sometimes it exhausted her and with Malfoy her busy brain was able to rest for a while.

It wasn't safe. It wasn't good. It wasn't what she should be thinking about again tonight, but it was. It always was.

"I thought I'd find you in here." A smug voice lifted Hermione's attention from the book she wasn't actually reading to the speaker sitting in front of her.

Cormac McLaggen was leaning heavily on the other side of the desk.

"Cormac!" Hermione gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking for you, why are you expecting someone else?" he chuckled. Hermione quickly looked around the Library. It seemed to be empty; it must have been later than she thought. "Were you?" Cormac asked again, interested in her answer this time.

“What? No! Of course not. I’m just surprised that you are still here this late. Normally I’m the last one left.”

“Then allow me to walk you back. I think you owe me a goodnight kiss after all.” Cormac raised an eyebrow.

Hermione fought the cringe that rolled over her. She honestly hadn’t given Cormac much thought after their disastrous date at Slughorn’s party. Her mind had been much too occupied by another for her to dwell on his sloppy kisses and urgent hands. She had figured he would have given up on her since she quite literally ran away from him that night, but she was not so lucky.

“I’ve still got some more work to do here—”

“It’s almost midnight on a Friday. I’m sure you don’t want to spend it locked up with all these musty old books.”

Hermione raised her chin and spoke clearly. “I like these books.”

“I’ve noticed.” Cormac rolled his eyes.

“Good to know your observation skills are so keen,” Hermione’s voice had an edge to it. “So put them to use and see that I’m not done here yet so if you don’t mind—”

Cormac reached across the desk with a quick hand and pulled the book she was reading back towards him.

“Stop it!” Hermione reached for it but once again he was too quick for her and leaned back, flipping through the pages. “You’ll make me lose my place!”

“Good Godric, Hermione...” Cormac’s expression darkened. “What are you *reading*?”

Hermione blushed. *Derelict Dark Arts* was not a typical book for a Hogwarts Student to read. She lifted herself out of her seat and grabbed it back from Cormac, huffing as she tried to find where she left off.

“It’s research,” she muttered as she flipped a weathered page back a little too roughly.

“For what? Who would even assign—”

“Are you done, Granger?”

Hermione jumped in her seat as Malfoy’s drawling voice came from behind her. He was leaning against one of the stacks with his arms folded over his chest and his grey eyes growing dark as they landed on Cormac across from her.

“Malfoy.” Cormac swallowed hard.

Malfoy had a look of disgust on his face before pulling his gaze back to Hermione. “I said are you done? I need that book for Snape’s assignment.”

“Snape assigned that book?” Cormac asked Hermione, his mouth hanging open.

“Erm, yes,” she lied quickly. “Special project.”

“Special project...” Cormac repeated, thinking it over.

“Yeah. Special project. For Snape’s *advanced* students. So fuck off.” Malfoy spat out nastily, coming to stand at Hermione’s shoulder. She looked up at him then back at Cormac who was looking warily at the pair of them.

“Sorry. Looks like I’ll be here a while more.” Hermione shrugged innocently, trying not to smile too much as Cormac gave Malfoy one last apprehensive glance before shuffling off.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief when Cormac disappeared from sight and leaned back against her chair.

“Thanks. He was—”

“In my way.” Malfoy threw himself down in the chair next to her. Much to her annoyance, he somehow even made that look graceful. He glared at the empty space where Cormac had just been sitting before turning towards her in his seat, reaching out and placing his hand on the back of her chair. “What are you reading?”

Momentarily taken back by his change in attitude, Hermione pushed the book over to him.

“*Derelict Dark Arts?*” Malfoy’s brows lowered over his eyes and Hermione bit her lip. Maybe she shouldn’t have shown it to him, what if he started asking the same questions as Cormac? She didn’t think someone else would show up to her rescue this time. “Granger, do you know what you’re getting yourself into?”

Hermione was surprised that he even bothered asking this. Could it be he was concerned about her? No, this was Malfoy and he would probably laugh if she opened a dangerous book and accidentally cursed herself.

“I think so,” she said in a small voice.

Malfoy’s silvery eyes searched hers for a few long moments before he leaned in a little closer to her. Once again she picked up on his minty smell and now the other scent, the one she couldn’t place before suddenly she realized it was the smell of parchment, crispy yet... creamy...

Malfoy’s eyes moved down to her lips and Hermione realized then that they were slightly parted and quick, shallow breaths passed through them making his scent even stronger in her head.

“Well, I know what I want to get into,” he purred and shifted a little in his seat, always moving closer to her. Hermione’s mouth felt dry and her heart beat quickly under her breast. He must have noticed because his angular face curved into a smirk. He dropped his hand from the desk onto her knee and the feel of his palm on her skin shot sparks off inside of her.

Slowly he trailed it up her leg and under her skirt. Hermione’s breath hitched in her throat as she watched his smirk spread across his face as his hand crept over the skin of her inner thigh.

“Right...” Malfoy breathed out, “*Here.*”

His fingers brushed against her cotton knickers and an unbidden whimper escaped from her. His face was an inch from hers, maybe less, and she could feel his breath on her lips, slow and steady and nothing like her own. “Right... Now.”

Malfoy pressed his hand fully against her center and Hermione gasped loudly. It echoed around the empty Library, travelling down the stacks and eventually absorbed into the worn pages of the books surrounding them.

“Malfoy, we can’t,” Hermione glanced around, making sure no one had heard her. “Not here!”

“Why not?” Malfoy breathed out against her lips. She could practically taste him. Her mouth opened a little wider, brows pulled together as she felt his hand begin to move, looking for a way in.

Hermione grabbed his wrist and felt the strength in it as she pulled his hand back from her. Her body screamed in rebellion against her mind as she stopped him.

“We can’t,” she repeated a little more urgently.

“We can,” Malfoy whispered. “I’ll show you.”

His lips landed on her neck and Hermione felt something inside her give way. They were soft at first, sending shivers down her spine as his hand landed back on her thigh. Malfoy trailed his mouth over her neck, the slight warmth of it setting her ablaze. His hand moved under the hem of her skirt again as he grazed his teeth along the shell of her ear before biting lightly on the lobe.

Hermione felt herself clench and tighten in anticipation. Malfoy pulled her off her seat in one quick swipe and onto his lap. He snaked his arms around her, holding her in place on top of him and dove back into her neck, moving down her neck this time towards the collar of her shirt. His hand raised up from her thigh and started pulling her shirt from where it was tucked into her skirt.

“Malfoy,” Hermione pushed against his chest. “Malfoy, stop.”

He let out a groan that evolved into a growl as he leaned back in the chair, but his arms stayed wrapped around her.

“You might be into edging, but I’m not,” he said harshly.

“I don’t even know what that is,” Hermione snapped in response to his changed tone.

“It’s when you...” Malfoy sighed and shifted underneath her. “Nevermind.”

“No, tell me,” she pushed forward. “I want to know. If this is something that we are going to do then I want—” Hermione stopped herself as Malfoy’s face cracked into a wicked grin. “I mean to say—”

“It’s when I get you close,” Malfoy cut her off. ‘So close,’ he played with the hem of her skirt, moving his fingers over her skin back and forth under it until she felt goosebumps rise on her flesh. “Then—”

Malfoy pulled his hand back and quickly pinched a hardened nipple through her shirt. Hermione gasped again and grabbed her chest. Malfoy let out a low laugh. “Then I stop,” he continued simply. ‘And you?’ his voice dropped. “You *beg me*.”

Hermione squeezed her legs together to stop whatever was happening in between them. "And... you don't want to do that?" she whispered.

Malfoy's silver eyes gleamed. "I do. And I will. I just don't like you doing it to me." He shifted under her again, pulling her further up on his lap and Hermione felt his hard length underneath her, pressing into her ass and thighs sharply.

"Oh!" She sat up straight but that did nothing but drive her more onto it.

Malfoy sighed contentedly and his hand moved over her ass, rubbing it through her skirt. He leaned himself up, wrapping his hand around the back of her neck once more before whispering, "I'm going to do so many dirty things to you..."

Hermione was fighting for control over herself. She wanted to give in and give him control like she had the night of Slughorn's party, but whereas that night she had not given herself over completely to him, she knew she wouldn't be able to hold out much longer. She wanted this the same as him. And he knew.

Malfoy's tongue slipped out of his mouth and he ran the tip of it over her neck before letting his lips close in on a sensitive spot just below her ear. Her limbs felt heavy and her stomach felt light, but nothing was as strong as the feeling of warmth between her legs, spreading through her like wildfire.

"I... I want to, but..."

"Tell me," Malfoy's voice was low and dark in her ear. "Tell me, Granger. What do you need? I'll give it to you." He pushed his hips up against her and Hermione felt his erection press against her.

Her thoughts were sluggish and felt like they were clouded behind a fog of lust. She had always thought she would lose her virginity to someone she loved, to someone she cared for. But she wanted *this*. It wasn't just lust or pleasure she was after, there was something about Draco Malfoy that made her want to pursue this, to explore these feelings. And she wanted to explore them with him.

"I need to know..." Hermione tried to find the right words. 'You.' Malfoy pulled back a little and his shining silver eyes searched hers for more of an explanation. "I just feel like I should know you a little better before we..."

Malfoy's face tightened only slightly and his voice was toneless as he said, "Okay."

Hermione let out a slow breath. "It's not like we have to be best friends or anything."

"Good. Because we're not. That's not what this is," Malfoy said sharply.

"I know that," Hermione snapped. Malfoy might make her heart race, but he also made her blood boil. "Merlin, you're insufferable!" She tried to stand up but Malfoy pulled her back down roughly.

"If it's suffering that you want," he growled. "You're going to love me."

"Get off of me," Hermione spat.

"Fuck me."

Hermione froze with her hands pressed against his chest. The muscles there were lean and hard and for a brief moment she wanted to know what they felt like against her bare skin.

“Fuck me like the dirty little Mudblood you are—”

Hermione shoved him back and jumped up. “I must have been MAD to think that we could ever—”

“You said you wanted to know me,” Malfoy said in a bored tone. ‘Well, here I am.’ He held out his arms. “Ask away.”

Hermione hesitated. She hated the way he casually used that vulgar term, but when else was she going to get the chance to ask Malfoy anything she wanted?

“Do you really think you’re better than me because of your blood?” she blurted out before she could stop herself.

Malfoy’s mouth twitched. “I know I am.” Hermione scoffed and tossed her head. “But that doesn’t mean I won’t enjoy every second I’m inside you—”

“Do you ever say anything that is not purist or sexist?” Hermione shouted. “Do you have any thought in that head of yours that is not offensive?!”

“Probably not.” Malfoy shrugged.

“And that doesn’t bother you? People hating you?”

“I don’t need other people’s approval to feel fulfilled.”

“So what do you need?”

Malfoy eyed her. “Right now I need you to bring that sweet little ass back over here and straddle me with it—”

“This is going nowhere,” Hermione shook her head. “I’m not asking you to be my boyfriend, I’m just asking to get to know you a little more before I—”

“Before what?” Malfoy stood up and took a step towards her. ‘Before you finally do something for yourself instead of trying to save the world all the time?’ Hermione looked up at him, eyes wide. “The whole world is going to Hell, Granger. Might as well enjoy the ride.”

How could someone with so many options and opportunities in life have such a pessimistic outlook? Draco rubbed his hand over his arm before dropping them to his sides. “Look, I don’t like talking about myself—”

“I’m shocked,” Hermione spouted.

Malfoy sneered at her. “So you get one more question. After that, you have to earn your answers. Got it?”

Hermione considered this for a moment and asked the only question that came to mind.

“Are you a Death Eater?”

Malfoy’s face hardened and tensed. His eyes narrowed until they were only slits and his jaw clenched so tightly a muscle popped in it.

“What the *fuck* kind of question is that?” He snarled.

“You said I could ask—”

“Yeah well I changed my mind. Quiz time is over.” Malfoy towered over her, glaring down at her and Hermione glanced over to her bag where her wand was safely stashed away. “You don’t get to ask me anymore questions. That’s not how this works.”

“Malfoy—”

“Fuck off, Granger.” Malfoy shoved past her and Hermione fell back against the shelves.

“Malfoy!” She called after him once she had righted herself, but Malfoy did not stop. His white blond hair disappeared down the darkened pathway at a quick pace.

Draco was still in a foul mood two days later and Granger’s question echoed around in his head ever since that night.

“Are you a Death Eater?”

This cursed mark on his arm was a burden in more ways than one. He had been careful, since returning to school to make sure that no one saw it. He showered late at night or early in the mornings and always dressed quickly, making sure it was covered at all times.

Fixing the Vanishing Cabinet was taking longer than he had originally thought and was eating up all of his free time. He spent many long nights closed up in the Room of Hidden Things working until his eyes burned from lack of sleep. In the tedious hours spent mending the intricate part of it, his mind wandered back to Granger.

Normally he liked playing with his thoughts of her. Imagining her in different positions, face down and ass up or on her knees with her mouth open, but lately all he could think about was that damned question.

Draco took another swig from the bottle of fire whisky. The liquid sloshed inside and he felt it go to his head quickly, drowning out the echo for a few moments.

“Faster.”

He glanced down at the dark haired head bobbing up and down over his groin. With all her practice, he thought she’d have her technique down by now, but Pansy always required direction. Pansy did give great head though, he had to admit. Draco smirked to himself; she’d had lots of practice, after all. She moved her mouth faster on him and Draco took another drink before laying his head back down. Drinking helped. Pansy’s mouth helped too. But both wore off after a while and his thoughts of his task, his family, his mark, and his Granger all returned.

He should have just lied to her. He should have laughed and played it off, but in that moment he had felt something that he couldn’t quite put his finger on, but it felt a little like shame. He did not want Granger to know the answer and he most certainly did not want her to find out the truth. If she did, she’d never speak to him again, let alone spread her legs for him. But she was just a Mudblood.... why did he care so much?

“Fuck, Pans, teeth!” Draco growled and Pansy pulled back quickly, licking her lips.

“Sorry,” she mumbled from her position at the side of his bed.

Draco sat up and grabbed a fistful of her hair, forcing her head back. Pansy gasped, but delight played in her dark eyes and her wet lips turned up in a smile.

“You think that’s funny?” Draco snarled.

“No.” Pansy said in a mock innocent voice while her smile widened.

“Then why are you smiling?” He pulled her hair, shaking her head a little.

Pansy gasped and winced. “I didn’t mean to,” she said, adopting the same sweet voice she used before.

“Open your fucking mouth.”

Pansy opened her mouth and stuck her tongue out. Draco shoved his cock in, feeling the back of her throat as he let out a low breath. Pansy coughed around him and he grabbed either side of her head, holding it still as her body twisted on her knees. He thrust roughly into her mouth.

So what if he was a Death Eater? Why should that have anything to do with him and Granger? It’s not like he cared what she thought of him. He just wanted to fuck her, right? That was it. Just wanted to fuck the girl who always beat him in classes, who had those twisted curls he had watched bounce for years, who had grown nicely into her body even though she tried to hide it under sweaters and jackets and too long skirts.

Pansy’s hands landed on his thighs, pressing into them as loud wet noises came from her open mouth. He leaned his head back, closing his eyes.

Granger’s curls... Those loose tawny brown twists that bounced around her face whenever her hand shot in the air at a Professor’s question. Mudbloods had their uses. There were plenty of Pureblood men who took Halfbloods and some even Mudbloods into their beds. They just didn’t flaunt it and they certainly didn’t marry them. And it was fine, because there was no way he would ever consider Granger as anything more than a casual encounter, right?

She stuck her tongue out farther so it ran along the bottom of his length, massaging him with every thrust in and out of her mouth. “Fuck!” Draco hissed as he felt himself getting closer. Pansy’s eyes were closed tightly, saliva dripping down her chin as she fought her gag reflex for his pleasure.

No, Granger would never be anything more than a fun fuck. But if that’s all she was, then why didn’t he just lie to her about the mark? It was too much to think about and none of it mattered enough. He would find her, lie about whatever he needed to lie about, and then fuck the living shit out of her virgin pussy and be done with her. That’s all.

Tears were streaming down Pansy’s face, making her dark make up run. “You want it?” Draco grunted. “You fucking want it?”

Pansy nodded as best she could. This was what was attractive about Pansy. She was always there when he needed her and she didn’t care what he did to her. In fact she quite liked the use and Draco wasn’t the only one she made herself available to. But that’s all it ever was

with her. That's all it ever was with any of the girls he'd had. He hadn't cared when he walked in on Theo on top of Pansy, but he had felt a cold sick feeling deep inside when he had seen McLaggen across the table from Granger.

Granger... Granger's lips on his, Granger's hand around his cock, Granger's tight little pussy, clenching around his fingers... Draco growled and held her head against him, sliding deep in her throat as he shot himself down it.

Pansy gasped for breath as he finally pulled himself back. She sunk back on her heels, bare chest rising and falling quickly as she tried to catch her breath. Draco cupped her cheek and wiped a bit of the black smears off her skin. "You did good, Pans," Draco said in a deep and satisfied voice and Pansy smiled up at him. "I've got work to do now. Tell Crabbe and Goyle I'll be up there shortly on your way out."

7. seven

Chapter 7

Honestly, what was she playing at? Draco tried to ignore the Mudblood as best as he could but for some reason he seemed to be fine tuned to her now and saw her, smelled her, fucking *felt* her every time they were in the same room. He clenched his jaw, trying to pay attention to Professor Vector, but it wasn't long before he felt the pull of her and turned to meet her big doe eyes.

They opened wide, surprised that he was actually looking at her again. He had spent the last few days doing his damndest to ignore the annoying little Mudblood, but all it did was make him even more attentive to what she was doing, where she was, and who she was with. Her small mouth opened just slightly and he watched the light glimmer off of her bottom lip before she pulled it in between her teeth, causing a small indentation on the soft pink flesh. Sweet Salazar he wanted to bite that lip.

Want to grab it in between his teeth and pull; clamping down with more and more pressure until she finally gave in and cried. Draco turned quickly feeling a jolt run deeply through him and straight to his groin. He dropped his head into his hand, holding it for a moment while he regained himself. Granger was a distraction. He had spent the last week rolling their last encounter over in his mind and had accomplished little on the Vanishing Cabinet because of it.

He had to stop this. It felt like his brain had been scorched by her; it was sunburnt and it couldn't heal because every time she was around she seemed to shine right into him like the bloody sun itself. This couldn't go on. He wouldn't be able to function, wouldn't be able to accomplish his task and that was the most important thing right now. He had to do this. For his family. For himself. For his Lord.

He could feel the mark on him at all times. It wasn't a tattoo that peeled and healed, it was a brand and caused constant discomfort at all times. Bellatrix had said it was so they were always reminded of their pledge to their Dark Lord, but Draco thought that maybe the old man just got off knowing he was causing them all pain at any given moment.

Professor Vector finished his lecture and Draco slung his bag across himself, scowling at the people around him as they quickly moved out of his way. He had made it halfway down the corridor when he heard her call out his name.

He had half a mind to just keep walking; make that bitch chase *him* for once. He'd spent plenty of time chasing her after all, but after three tortuously slow strides he turned and Granger barreled into him.

His hands did not shoot up to steady her, instead her hands landed on his chest and he felt his skin burn underneath them in an all-together different kind of pain than his arm. He could

smell the thick warmth of her vanilla cinnamon and it swarmed into his head, making him feel almost dizzy for a moment.

“Oh!” she gasped and looked up at him with deep, wide eyes.

“You’re touching me again.” Draco made his best attempt to sound bored.

“Sorry,” Granger pulled back and his arm twitched, longing to reach and pull her back but Draco controlled himself. Granger might drive him crazy, but he had a lifetime’s experience with control and kept his expression stoic.

“What do you want, Granger?” Draco sighed, looking over the top of her head because, Sweet Salazar, if he kept looking at her fuck-me-please eyes he was going to do just that.

“I...” Granger took a deep breath and he fought to keep his gaze from sliding down to her chest as it expanded. “I wanted to see if we could... talk.”

“Talk.” Draco repeated.

“Talk.” Granger shifted uncomfortably.

He crossed his arms and let his gaze drop back down to her as she tucked her loose curls behind her ear. “And why would I want to talk to you?” Granger opened her mouth to start on a lengthy explanation, he was sure, but Draco didn’t give her the chance. “I thought I had made myself clear.”

She hesitated and he saw quick thoughts pass through her deep eyes. “You were clear,” she finally said, “No more questions. Fine. But I don’t want to ask you questions, I just want you to listen.”

Curiosity might have killed the cat, but Draco was a snake though and though. He looked down at her with hard, calculating eyes. Granger wasn’t... devious, but she was clever. What did she have planned? Was this some scheme to get him to... what? If she wanted to fuck him all she had to do was say the word. So what was she playing at?!

“Fine.” He said, making sure it came out harsh. ‘Tonight. In the Restricted Section.’ Granger let out a low breath of relief. Draco leaned in close to her, taking a deep draft of her warm scent before whispering, “Knickers optional.”

Crookshanks was curled up on her lap and that was the only reason she was still in the common room where Ron and Lavender had decided that a cozy night by the fire was exactly what they needed. She missed Ron. Even though he was aggravating and inconsiderable at times, he had been her best friend for years and now there was an empty part of her where Ron had once been.

She missed the way he could always pull her from her head when she got too worked up about classes and the way his freckles danced across his nose when he smiled at her. But he had changed since he had gotten with Lavender and whereas before he might have said something that offended her, he had never meant to hurt her. His crude impressions of her in class and his comments after Quidditch practice were enough to stop Hermione from trying to reconcile.

And over their years of friendship, she had developed deeper feelings for him as well. She had thought he had some of those same feelings for her, that was until the night he had kissed Lavender in the middle of the common room. Godric, that night was the night that started all this mess with Malfoy too. Had it really already been almost two months of this? In some ways it felt like days and others like years.

Hermione ran her hand over Crookshanks and he sleepily opened his golden eyes, looking up at her before beginning to purr loudly.

“Are you still not talking?” Ginny asked her as she reached over to scratch Crookshanks behind the ear.

“Ronald has made no attempt to apologize to me and I refuse to be the one who makes the first move.” Hermione said stiffly. “Plus, he seems like he has all the company he needs,” she added under her breath as Lavender snuggled up under his arm and sighed wistfully.

“Look, no one knows better what a prick he can be sometimes, but, I mean, you’ve been friends forever. Are you really going to let this come between you?”

Hermione blinked in surprise. “Me? He’s the one—” she scoffed. “He’s letting *her* come between us!”

“Yeah, but...” Ginny sighed. ‘I get where you are coming from, I do,’ she said quickly as Hermione took a breath to reply. “You know Ron. If you just... Oh I don’t know. I just don’t want to see you end up doing something you’ll regret.”

Hermione stared at Ginny. Uncanny was what it was, that she chose those words, that phrase, to use in this moment. She hadn’t told anyone, not a soul, about her and Malfoy and there was no way that Ginny could have figured any of it out. She glanced over at Ron, his hair bright red in the glowing firelight. Then Lavender’s hand ran through it, pulling his face down towards hers. She closed her eyes before turning back to Ginny.

“I’m going to do anything I will regret. Trust me.”

“*Lectio Nefastus*,” Hermione whispered and the iron gate to the Restricted Section swung open with a loud creak. She stepped inside following the floating blue lights of the candles deeper in. She began to feel her nerves light up, starting in her fingers and traveling up her arms until they wrapped tightly around her and her breath came in ever quickening gasps.

She peered around the tall stacks, hoping to catch a glimpse of his fair hair in the pale blue lights hovering amongst the dark shelves. After the fourth or fifth row the thought began to occur to Hermione that maybe she had beat Malfoy here. They had not set a time, after all, an oversight she felt a little foolish about now. Had he already come and left? Or was he going to make her wait here for him? Maybe he was standing her up.

It was unlike her to not plot out a specific time and even an exact place in the Restricted Section for them to meet. Although it was a part of the Hogwarts Library the Restricted Section was not organized like the rest of it. The stacks had a strange way of getting longer as you walked down them and sometimes the books on the shelves changed so you couldn’t tell

what part you were in. Hermione had gotten lost in here before and did not want to repeat the experience.

She turned back to wait near the iron gate that closed it off from the student's library, but the gate wasn't where she thought it should be. A large stone shelf of dusty books sat where in her path instead. Her heart beat a little faster and she tried to retrace her steps to get back to the entrance, but when she got to the end of the aisle, there was just another row of stacks in front of her.

"No no no!" Hermione whispered. "Not again..."

The last time she had gotten lost had been in her fourth year when she had been trying to find anything to help Harry figure out how to breathe underwater for the second Triwizard task. He and Ron were drooling and nodding off into their books and Hermione had slipped into the Restricted Section hoping to find the answer. It wasn't long before she had gotten turned around and could not find her way back to the entrance again.

Eventually she had tucked herself in a small corner, pulled her knees up to her chest, and waited until morning when she heard Madam Pince shuffling around. When she finally made it down to the Great Hall, Ron had asked her where she had gotten to and she brushed it off, saying she had gone back to her dorm to look at a book she had left there. She hadn't wanted them to know she had wandered off and gotten lost. She was Hermione Granger, after all, the brightest witch of her age.

The same nervous fear that had gripped her that night was tightening its hold on her again and Hermione raced down one of the long aisles, hoping to find some sort of clue as to where she was at the end of it. Instead she was greeted with more darkness. There were only a few candles that had drifted over here and the shadows were deep. Hermione didn't like to think of what might be lurking in them. She didn't fancy meeting a Boggart right now, even if she knew the incantation to repel them by heart.

She stopped running and took a large breath, trying to calm herself. This was the Restricted Section; she had been here many times. If she panicked, she would only get herself more lost. She had to think straight, be logical. She could get herself out of this; she had been in much more dire situations before.

A candle hovered above her, basking her in a pale blue light and Hermione breathed out slowly. All she had to do was keep moving and eventually she would find her way out, right? That was reasonable, that was practical. She came to the end of the aisle and looked left and right trying to decide which path to take. Well, one was just as good as the other at this point and Hermione was about to take a step forward when Malfoy turned from an adjacent aisle, taking long strides with a scowl on his face.

"Granger." He blinked in surprise.

Hermione had to stop herself from sighing in relief at the sight of him, but she was very relieved. It wasn't the exit, but at least she wasn't alone anymore.

"Where've you been? I've been all over this bloody place and—" Malfoy stopped talking and Hermione thought he must not have wanted her to know he had gotten lost too. He narrowed his eyes, adopting his harsh tone again. "It's impolite to invite someone somewhere and then hide from them."

"I wasn't hiding from you," Hermione admitted and took a step towards him. "I got turned around and I was trying to find my way back to the entrance—"

"Yeah, good luck with that." Malfoy muttered under his breath.

"Did you get lost too?" She took another step forward.

"No." Malfoy hissed. "I was... looking for you."

"Right." Hermione let a small smile play on her lips.

"What do you want, Granger? You hauled me out here for some mysterious reason and then decided to play hide and seek."

"I told you, I wasn't hiding from you—"

"What. Do. You. Want." Malfoy took a step in her direction with each enunciated word until he was in front of her.

Hermione looked up at him. He was striking in the blue white light that had followed her to him. He was like a marble statue come to life with pale skin that stretched over angled cheekbones, a sharp jawline, and silver grey eyes with irises that seemed to be expanding the longer he looked down at her. His white blonde hair was pushed back from his face, giving her a clear view of what centuries of Pureblood breeding could produce.

"I wanted to apologize for upsetting you. And..." she trailed off, nerves squirming inside her. Malfoy eyed her carefully. This is why she had come here, this was what she wanted. 'I want to find out what I can be,' Hermione breathed out. "And I want you to show me."

Malfoy stared down at her for a moment with his curiously unreadable expression. She watched the black of his pupils increase as he searched her own eyes for an answer to a question he hadn't asked.

"Not scared that I'm a Death Eater anymore?" He asked in a cool voice.

Hermione shook her head. She had been foolish to ask that question and it had stemmed from spending too much time with Harry without Ron as the third leg to their tripod. Together they all balanced each other out, but separate they were off kilter. She had argued with Harry more times than she could count that Malfoy wasn't a Death Eater and thought maybe she had asked him that in the moment hoping to prove herself right.

Hermione took the final step towards him, closing the remaining distance between them until they were mere inches apart.

"Good." Malfoy smirked a little and rubbed his thumb over her cheek, his palm cool against her neck. She couldn't help but notice that it was his left hand he reached for her with and fought against the urge to look down at his forearm. His white shirt covered it, but she might have been able to make out the shadow of a mark if she tried hard enough. But she didn't. She kept her eyes on his and was rewarded with the smirk widening a little. He had noticed she had behaved herself. "Good," he repeated, softer this time.

"You'll show me?" she asked softly. Then plucking up her courage added, "Tell me... what to do?"

Malfoy's rain-grey eyes lit up like lightning had struck in them. "Oh, my sweet little Mudblood," he cooed and brushed his thumb over her cheek again. "You have no idea how badly I've wanted to hear you say those words."

Hermione's stomach clenched pleasurably. Excitement churned in her and she found herself smiling back at him. She had wanted to say those words for a while now too.

She hated the feeling of being lost or out of control so she planned every minute of her life to stop that from happening. She had her routines and rules and kept to them. But when she was with Malfoy she could just relax and turn her brain off for a while. She didn't have to be in charge or worry that she wasn't doing what she should be. Malfoy would tell her what to do. And it felt good, so good.

She closed her eyes as his thumb grazed across her skin once more.

Malfoy shoved her back against the stack of books behind her and her eyes flew open just in time to see the dark desire swirling in his like storm clouds before his mouth was on hers. His hands... his hands were everywhere in a second. He grabbed her wrists, tight, and pulled them above her head. He easily held them in one of his and let his other roam over her without any interference.

Her whole body had tightened with nerves and excitement so she did her best to relax herself into his grip. She softened her body and felt him press further into hers, pushing her hard against the stacks and deepening their kiss with practiced pressure. Hermione tilted her face up a little farther and Malfoy's tongue slithered against hers, the taste of mint was sweet and crisp in her mouth. His teeth captured her bottom lip and she felt herself shake a little as a low growl came up from deep in Malfoy's throat.

He bit down a little harder and Hermione pushed her chest against his in response. Malfoy's hand slid between them and he had two of them undone before Hermione realized he was unbuttoning her shirt. His teeth sunk deeper into her lip as he reached the third button, his fingers brushing the skin of her stomach as it slipped open. The pressure on her lip increased as he reached the next button and Hermione felt the pain of his pinching teeth.

She tried to pull back, but that only made him bite harder. Her shirt fell open and his hand slid over her stomach causing her to inhale sharply as it quickly reached her breast, grasping it and pushing his hand over it. Another groaning growl and Hermione was sure that he was about to break the skin of her lip. A small high-pitched moan escaped her and Malfoy slammed his hips into hers where she could feel the hard length of him.

Malfoy released her lip and much to her surprise placed a few tender kisses against it before gently nibbling on the tender flesh. The feel of him against her and the sudden gentleness he showed her bruised lip made something sink deep into her and tighten her lower stomach pleasurably.

Malfoy hand slid back down her stomach and then quickly under her skirt, reaching between her legs and Hermione felt a thrill of excitement pass through her causing her to widen her legs a little to allow him easier access to her.

"Mmm, Granger," Malfoy's voice was rough and hoarse. His fingers trailed along her knickers and she suddenly wished she had opted not to wear them like he had suggested.

“Let’s see how wet you are,” Malfoy said in a low voice and Hermione found herself nodding.

His long fingers slid inside her knickers, brushing against her center and she trembled at his touch. He pulled them down from the crotch until they were around her knees and Hermione shimmied out of them. His eyes shone like ash-covered coals and his grip on her wrists tightened as his fingers brushed over her again. She found herself twisting in his grip, trying to elongate his touch on her as he slowly ran two fingers on either side of her fold.

“Did you want something?” Malfoy teased her, running them over her again.

Hermione’s breathing was labored and she was aching to feel him against her, inside her, again. She knew he was going to do this, going to make her say it. There was something oddly exhilarating about actually saying the words. She was nervous and embarrassed, but the lust clear on Malfoy’s face somehow made it okay.

“Touch me,” she breathed out. “Please.”

Malfoy’s eyes darkened and he let out a low breath before slowly dipping his fingers into her.

Hermione leaned her head back against the books and let out a shuddering gasp as she felt him leisurely slide his fingers in and out of her.

“Oh, Granger,” his voice slid over her like velvet. “You’re practically dripping for me.”

Hermione gave another small moan as he continued to work his fingers a few more times. “But you don’t want these,” he said in his patronizing tone and slid his hand from her.

“What?” Hermione gasped.

He pushed her shirt open farther and reached his hand around her back to unsnap her bra and pushing it off her chest. She could feel the moisture on his fingers as he rolled her nipple in between them before pulling on it a little.

“You want something else, don’t you?” Malfoy pressed his hips back into hers. ‘You little slut,’ he whispered into her ear. She felt a shiver run down her spine at his words. “Say it,” he went on, gripping her wrists above her head harder. “Say you want me.”

Hermione felt like she was on fire. Her body was burning with desire and there was no denying that she did want this. She couldn’t understand why she had such an attraction, such a yearning for him, for Malfoy, but she did and she couldn’t fight it anymore. She wanted to turn her brain off for just a few short moments and let her body have what it wanted, what it needed.

“I want you, Malfoy,” Hermione breathed out. “I want this.”

She felt his cock jump at these words and Malfoy’s hand dropped from her breast to her knee, pulling her leg up around him rough enough to make her gasp out sharply. He wrapped it around himself and slid his hand back around moving it between them and Hermione heard his clank of his belt coming undone and then a deep sigh and he freed himself from his trousers.

He moved his hips against her a little and suddenly she remembered just how impressive his size had been when she had him in her hand. She felt him pressed against her lower stomach and could not help but feel a little worried about how he was going to feel inside her. She didn't have anyone to compare it to, but even with her limited personal experience with the male anatomy, she knew that Malfoy was well above average.

His hand was back on her thigh, holding her in place and he pushed her skirt up around her waist. "This will hurt more than that lip of yours." He grinned wickedly as her eyes widened a little. Malfoy leaned down and kissed her again and Hermione's lip flared with pain at the pressure he applied against it. She let out a small, shaky breath, but nodded when he pulled away and looked down at her for confirmation.

"I'm not scared," she breathed out and watched his grey eyes darken on her as his desire grew.

Malfoy grabbed her ass, lifting her up a little and positioned himself against her. She could feel the pressure of him at her entrance and bit her lip in nervousness before remembering its tenderness. His lips found her bruised one and massaged it with his own with that controlled gentleness he had surprised her with earlier. Hermione lifted her other leg and wrapped it around him as well as to let him know she was ready and Malfoy gripped himself before she felt his hip thrust and he was inside her.

Hermione cried out into his mouth the same time he let out a deep moan into hers. Her body tensed and tightened at the foreign object that had just entered her. He pulled back a little before pressing forward again and getting a little farther this time. Her hands reached out for what she didn't know, but his grip on her wrists stayed strong.

"Oh fuck," Malfoy muttered as he lifted her up further and buried his face in her hair.

"Oh my God, Malfoy!" Hermione gasped out as the pressure inside her built as he slid a little more of himself in. He had been right, it did hurt and she felt her body clench against the pain shooting up from in between her legs.

Malfoy's voice was deep and commanding in her ear as he spoke. "I'm barely in you. You've got to relax." Hermione nodded and tried her best to loosen her muscles but as Malfoy moved a just little she winced and tightened up again. 'Just listen to my voice, don't be nervous.' Malfoy said in that same tone. "It'll hurt less once you relax. Yes, that's a good girl." He got further in as Hermione focused on his deep voice in her ear.

She closed her eyes and felt the warmth of tears pooling at the corners of her eyes. He was still in her, but that didn't stop the expanding pressure that was pushing her open. His fingers wrapped tightly around her wrists and he slid himself out half an inch and then an inch back in, gradually making his way deeper in her. Malfoy's breathing was slow and controlled and she used the sound of it to ground herself in this new experience. Slowly she felt herself unfold and loosen little by little as she accepted more and more of him inside her. Suddenly she felt a different pressure deeper within.

Hermione looked at Malfoy for explanation and saw his eyes clouded over with lust.

"It's about to feel so much fucking better," he said in a low voice. 'But it's going to hurt again.' Hermione took in a deep breath and nodded. "Here," Malfoy dropped his hand in

between them and Hermione felt his fingers find the bud between her legs. She gasped as he swirled his finger around it a few times. “You like that, don’t you?” He grinned a little at her.

“Yes,” Hermione breathed out, giving herself over to Malfoy’s touch.

The pleasure stemming from his fingers counteracted the pressure she felt from him and after a few moments found herself tightening her legs around him and angling her hips for him to move easier.

“Yeah,” Malfoy slowly started to move in her again. ‘You want this cock?’ he asked her in a gruff voice. “You want all of it?”

Hermione was breathing faster as her blood began to race. His fingers worked on her bud, teasing it in ever-smaller circles. “Yes,” she gasped. “Yes!”

Malfoy thrust himself into her and Hermione arched herself against the books behind her as he broke through the pressure inside of her and she felt him enter her fully. Malfoy groaned loudly and she was afraid that her quick movement was going to make their precarious position compromised, but he held her firmly against him, pressing her hands hard into the books for balance.

“Fucking hell, you’re tight,” Malfoy growled as he slid almost all the way out of her before plunging back in causing her to cry out. ‘You feel so good,’ he grunted and quickened his pace. “So fucking good.”

Hermione could barely catch her breath and her legs tightened around him as he thrust in and out of her at a steady pace. She could tell he was holding back, keeping himself controlled, for her benefit. It was her first time and her body was still learning to accept him into it. Malfoy’s lips found hers again and he swallowed her moans as he sped up gradually.

“Tell me,” he panted, staring straight into her eyes, “what my cock feels like inside you.”

Good. It felt good. Godric, it felt amazing. It hurt, but for some reason she didn’t mind it as much as she thought she would. She was stretched around him and felt every inch of him inside her. Once she got past the initial discomfort she had started to feel small sparks of pleasure shooting up her. They grew with each of Malfoy’s thrusts, reaching ever higher.

“Answer me.” Malfoy growled and thrust harder into her.

Hermione made a kind of squeaking moan and tried to find her breath so she could answer him. “So big,” she gasped out. “You’re... filling me.”

He made an almost purring noise at her response then dipped his head into the crook of her neck and pumped himself against her.

The sparks of pleasure were reaching her head now and Hermione was letting out gasping moans with almost every breath. She felt herself tighten around him, but this time it wasn’t painful, but pleasant. She could feel her heart beating faster and faster and knew that she was coming to the brink and soon.

“Oh fuck, Granger,” Malfoy groaned and pushed himself in again. ‘Your pussy feels so good. I knew it would be. Even better than I—’ “Malfoy stopped talking suddenly and gripped her wrists tight enough to send a few shots of pain down her arms. But Hermione didn’t care,

in fact, they almost felt good combined with the pleasure racing in her blood.” Say my name.’ He ordered. “When you come, say my name.”

Hermione leaned her head back as his teeth grazed her neck and he latched on, sucking at the skin there and nipping along it.

She felt the rising sensation in her body and moaned out loud enough for it to echo around them. Her thighs pressed against him, her back arched, and fireworks went off inside of her as she clenched his cock deep inside her.

“Malfoy...” she moaned softly as it built up inside her, growing and continuing as Malfoy moved quickly against her.

“My name,” he whispered in her ear before dropping his mouth to just under her ear.

Hermione felt the pleasure explode in her and she gasped in breath and called out, “Draco!”

He groaned at the sound of his name and his teeth bit down on the tender skin of her neck, sinking in until she stopped shaking and her body fell back into his grip.

“Fuck, fuck!” Malfoy grunted and pulled out of her, holding himself right above her mound and tightened his hold on her wrists enough to make her gasp and she felt him shoot himself on her lower stomach, white blonde hair falling into his eyes as he watched, entranced. He vanished it before she could even look down, like he didn’t want the evidence of what he had done with her visible for any longer than it had to be.

He removed his hand from her wrists and wrapped his arm around her middle as she loosened her legs’ hold on him and he set her back down on the ground. Malfoy kept his hands on her, leaning her against the shelves to make sure she was steady. She watched him carefully but his expression was stoic and gave nothing away of what lay behind those granite grey eyes.

They took a few moments to situate themselves and adjust their clothing back. Hermione had her shirt half way button back up when she watched as Malfoy bent down and scooped up her white knickers from the ground. She felt herself blush and reached out for them but he quickly pulled them back out of her reach.

“These,” he said clearly, holding them up. “These are mine now.”

Hermione felt herself wither under his steady gaze and merely said, “Okay,” which caused a self satisfied smile to pass over his face.

She fastened another button of her top and tucked her hair back behind her ears before glancing up at him again. The smile was gone and the unreadable expression was back in place, but for just a moment Malfoy looked almost... confused? And... tired, no not tired, *exhausted*; as if he hadn’t had a proper sleep in weeks. “Are... Are you okay?”

“What?” Malfoy’s head shot up and the moment was wiped from his face with a quick blink. “What do you mean?”

Hermione shook her head. Maybe it had been a trick of the low light? She could say that, but she knew what she had seen in that half second that Malfoy had his guard down.

“Nothing,” she tucked her hair back behind her ear again. “I didn’t mean—”

“Don’t go thinking that changed anything,” Malfoy said quickly. “Between us.”

It had taken all of two minutes for Malfoy to turn into a complete prick again. She glared at him, crossing her arms over her chest. “I know that.” Hermione snapped.

“Good,” Malfoy sneered. Then he closed the distance between them, staring down at her and licked his lips. He ran his fingers over her jaw and down her throat and Hermione stopped breathing. “So good,” Malfoy said in his low voice and she felt a shiver run down her spine.

His fingers trailed down her chest and in between her breasts. “You should get back to your common room, Granger,” Malfoy’s mouth twitched in a smirk. ‘Wouldn’t want anyone thinking you... “Her skin tingled under his touches and she watched his eyes drop to her chest.” Weren’t a good little girl, now would we?’ She felt a pull and looked down to see the Malfoy had finished buttoning her shirt closed. Then his mouth was at her ear again. “That is, anyone but *me*.”

Hermione climbed through the portrait hole, rubbing her forehead. Too many thoughts tonight and her mind would not stop spinning. As soon as she had left the Restricted Section the thoughts had started and not stopped building on top of each other the whole way back here. She hoped that once she got into bed sleep would come fast. She could process all of this in the morning when the sun was shining. Tonight was too dark to work through all this and once she had come down off her cloud of bliss, her body had begun to feel sore from Malfoy’s use. She was sure there would be marks on her wrists and neck tomorrow. Not to mention the deep ache in her center. But... it also felt a little... *good*. What was *wrong* with her?

“Hermione.”

She spun around. She hadn’t even noticed that Ron was sitting in one of the large armchairs by the fire until he had said her name. The common room was normally empty at this time of night and Ron was the last person she expected to see right now.

Hermione paused. They hadn’t spoken in weeks and she wasn’t sure if she wanted to start now, not right after...

“Where were you?” He stood up and took a few steps towards her.

“The Library,” Hermione snapped.

Ron chuckled. “I should have known.” He shook his head and rubbed the back of his neck. Hermione noticed that his build had lost a little of the give it had and hardened after the long hours of Quidditch practice. Malfoy’s body had been solid and firm. His arms had surprising strength as he had held her up and gripped her wrists tight... Hermione pulled at her sleeves.

“You haven’t been around much though and I thought that... Well, maybe...” Ron stumbled over his words and his ears began to turn a little red.

“Spit it out, Ron,” Hermione said a little harsher than she had intended. His blue eyes looked troubled for a moment before she sighed and said, “I’m tired, I just want to go to bed.”

“I thought maybe you were seeing someone,” Ron admitted. “Are you?”

Hermione’s heart skipped a beat. Ron had been the last person she thought was paying her comings and goings any attention.

“Is it McLaggen?” Ron asked tentatively.

“I’m not seeing McLaggen,” Hermione answered instinctively and Ron breathed out a sigh of relief. ‘But if I was,’ she continued, “It wouldn’t be any of your business. You certainly didn’t ask my opinion before you latched onto Lavender.”

Ron’s brows dropped over his eyes. “Look, I know you’re still upset with me and I understand why.” His shoulders slumped a little. “But whatever you’re doing... sneaking out, disappearing for stretches of time...” Hermione scoffed and rolled her eyes. Ron didn’t care about her, if he did he wouldn’t have spent the last two months connected at the lips with another girl.

“Even Ginny says she hardly sees you anymore,” Ron went on. “This isn’t like you, Hermione. I’m worried about you.”

A sudden pang of longing shot through her chest. Ron’s clear blue eyes looked sad as he gazed at her and she fought the urge to hug him, finding comfort in his friendly arms as she had done many times before. But she could still feel Malfoy’s arms around her, pushing her and holding her as he—

“Worry about your girlfriend, Ronald, not me.” Hermione said firmly and turned, climbing the steps to the girls dormitory quickly before he could respond.

8. eight

Chapter 8

Maybe she should have been embarrassed or worried about the fact that she had just lost her virginity not to someone she cared about and loved but someone who made her blood boil, but all Hermione could think of was the wonderful light feeling inside of her that was stemming from deep down and bursting up like rays of sunlight.

There was an unusual bounce to her step as she made her way to the Great Hall the next morning for breakfast and she felt childish that she couldn't stop her lips from curving up and turning into a bright smile every five seconds. Her loose curls moved with each step she took, tossing back and forth on her shoulders as she skipped down the stairs from the Gryffindor common room.

Even Lavender's stony glare had not defeated the warmth Hermione had woken up with. Her blonde dorm mate had watched her with careful eyes as Hermione stretched and offered a cheery, "Good morning!"

Lavender was looking at her like she had done something personally wrong to her, but Hermione was used to ignoring her and easily fell back on that habit, too busy with other thoughts to give many to the cold expression on Lavender's face.

"What's on your arms?" she finally sneered as Hermione slipped out of her sleep shirt, pulling a crisp white button down from her dresser drawer.

It was then that Hermione noticed the dark purpling around her wrists. Flashbacks of Malfoy's rough grip on them, squeezing tighter as his mouth hungrily sucked on her neck... his teeth biting into her, making her gasp—

"Devil's Snare," Hermione said quickly. "I was helping Professor Sprout replant some of them and—" she stopped as she saw Lavender shared a bored look with Parvati. It wasn't uncommon for her to help professors for extra credit and for the first time, she was glad that they just thought of her as a boring little bookworm. Hermione quickly slipped her shirt on and checked herself in the small mirror on the dresser.

Her eyes widened slightly. It wasn't just her arms, it was her neck too. Malfoy's marks were scattered across her skin; undeniable proof that she was not the good girl everyone thought her to be anymore. And deep down, maybe she never really was. Hermione quickly buttoned her shirt up and slid her tie in place. Along with her bushy hair, the marks were covered fairly well. Anyways, who would suspect there was anything underneath her clean appearance?

There wasn't much she could do about the slight swell and redness to her lip though. She ran the pad of her finger over it. The delicate pink skin had been obviously been treated roughly, but as Hermione pulled it into her mouth and sucked on it she thought of those few

soft kisses Malfoy had placed on it after and her lip slipped out of her mouth as it pulled into a smile.

She slowed as she neared the large double doors to the Great Hall and suddenly the thought occurred to her that she was going to have to see Malfoy in just a few seconds. How should she act? Should she look over at him? They certainly exchanged many glances over the past few weeks so would it be odd if she didn't seek him out? She took a deep breath, remembering those eyes boring into her as he plunged himself inside of her and Hermione paused before entering.

She just had to act normal, like everything was fine. It *was* fine. It was *more* than fine. The smile crept back onto her face and she bit her lip to stop it before she felt the tenderness there as well. Had he done that on purpose? Marked her up so he would be in her thoughts? Well, little did he know, he was already in her thoughts enough. Hermione breathed out. But of course, he *did* know that.

She ran her fingers through her hair, making sure that it was pulled around her neck inconspicuously before holding her head high and marching into the Great Hall.

She made it all the way to Ginny's side and sat down, greeting her friend brightly as she started pouring herself some pumpkin juice before her eyes instinctively moved over to the Slytherin table. He was easy enough to pick out among the crowd with his white blond head inches higher than those around it. But this morning it was bent low, leaning down towards.... Pansy.

Hermione's heart skipped a beat. Pansy was smiling and giggling with Malfoy's arm around her as he whispered something in her ear with a grin on his face.

How had she forgotten? How had she not remembered?! Malfoy had a girlfriend. A heavy stone of guilt fell inside of her and made her stomach churn unpleasantly.

"Hermione!" Ginny called out.

Pumpkin juice was overflowing from her goblet as she continued to pour more into it. Ginny grabbed the pitcher from her quickly and Hermione grabbed a napkin, trying to mop up the mess on her plate and table.

"Sorry!" she whined. "Oh my goodness..." she pulled out her wand and waved it over the spilled juice and it evaporated instantly.

Hermione took a deep breath and made sure that everything was back in order, as much as it could be. The rack of toast was soaked through though and Harry frowned at it as he took a seat across from her.

"What's happened here?" he asked.

"Hermione decided the toast was too dry for her liking," Ginny grumbled and Harry laughed, a little too loud and long causing both Hermione and Ginny to stare at him until he quieted.

"What? It was funny..." he muttered and prodded a soggy piece of toast with his fork.

"What were you thinking about so hard that you poured out the entire pitcher of pumpkin juice?" Harry asked, turning the empty vessel upside down and letting a few drops fall into

his goblet.

Hermione quickly poured half of her over-filled goblet into his. “Nothing. I mean, just—” she huffed. “Overthinking.”

“That’s it then.” Ginny announced and Hermione and Harry both looked at her. “We’re going to do something fun. You’ve got to turn this—” Ginny poked Hermione’s forehead, “off once in a while.”

The blush was in her cheeks before she could stop it. “I—”

“We could both use a night off,” Ginny continued. “Dean has been driving me up the wall.”

Harry’s green eyes lit up as his head shot in Ginny’s direction.

“Just a night to hang out and not worry about boys or school—” Ginny grabbed the book that Hermione was pulling out of her bag from her hands. “Just us. You’re hardly around anymore.”

Hermione knew she was right. After her and Ron’s conversation last night she needed to make sure that she wasn’t neglecting her friendships and also make sure that no one knew what she was doing. What she had *done*, she corrected herself. Hermione glanced across the Hall again. Pansy’s hand was on his leg under the table and Malfoy’s silver eyes were shining as he listened to her talk, his lips pulled back to expose straight white teeth. The same teeth that had bit her lip just last night...

“Ginny that actually sounds like exactly what I need,” Hermione stated and Ginny beamed. Hermione noticed that Harry smiled too, staring at Ginny and blinking slowly in her direction.

“Perfect. Tonight then,” Ginny went on. “We don’t have practice tonight, do we Harry?”

Harry seemed pulled from his thoughts. “Hmm? What?” he asked. “Oh, no. Did you want to? I can call one!”

Hermione tried not to laugh at her friend’s apparent lack of understanding and noticed a small flush of color in Ginny’s cheeks.

But her relief was short-lived. Her mind was spinning with deep thoughts as Ginny and Harry began to discuss Quidditch. She hadn’t felt any sort of remorse over what she had done until now, until she realized that maybe Malfoy’s insistence that no one find out wasn’t just because she was Muggleborn, but because he had a girlfriend and didn’t want her to know that he had cheated on her.

Suddenly Hermione felt dirty, used, and... a little abandoned. It wasn’t like she thought that there was anything between her and Malfoy, quite the opposite in fact, but these feelings didn’t make sense. Ideas, thoughts, and concepts she knew what to do with. She could puzzle them out and come to a logical conclusion, but feelings... emotions... These things she was less adept in and oftentimes they were confusing, clouding up her organized mind with unexplained notions she didn’t know how to work through.

This was not her area of expertise and the person she would normally go to for help was... Ron. He might not understand emotions all that well, but he was a great sounding board for

them and more than once she had found relief in talking through things with him. He saw things from a very different perspective than her and it was interesting and refreshing to discuss things with him when she couldn't figure them out on her own. But he wasn't an option anymore. He wasn't hers anymore.

Maybe she could try and find some relief with Ginny tonight. They had grown close over the years when she visited the Burrow and plus, she needed to catch up with her. Hermione hadn't exactly been around a lot over the past couple of weeks and Ginny was clearly going through something herself. At the very least, it would be a distraction.

Hermione took a sip of her pumpkin juice and set the goblet carefully back down on the table, not wanting to cause any more of a mess than she already had. And this was a mess. It had been simple, just a hookup between two people who were mutually attracted to each other until this morning. Now the cloud she had been floating on this morning had turned into a storm and she felt like she was falling down, down, down...

His eyes were the color of storm clouds when he turned them to meet hers. She wanted to look away. She wanted to turn her head to the side and laugh at something to show him that she was happier there with her friends than she had been pressed against him last night. She wanted him to take his arm from around Pansy.

His eyes narrowed and he pressed his lips together. He was watching her, studying her for her reaction. The corner of his mouth twitched; threatening her with that playful smirk he so often gave her these days.

She glared back at him. He had cheated on his girlfriend with her. He had made her an accomplice in his deceit and now she was tarnished with it. With him. His marks were scattered across her neck and arms. She pursed her lips, ignoring the small pain it caused in her tender bottom lip.

The smirk carved its way onto his marble face and his storm grey eyes turned mischievous. He *liked* the reaction he was getting from her. He liked that he was able to cause a reaction in her at all, she realized. He wasn't ashamed or apologetic for what they had done together. He was sitting there with Pansy and staring right at her...

Pansy reached up and turned his face back to hers. Malfoy's mouth moved and she let out a bark like laugh. Hermione was disgusted. Disgusted with him, with herself... With having to watch him run his hand down her arm and back up again—

She stood up suddenly, knocking her goblet of pumpkin juice over in the process of grabbing her overstuffed bag and quickly made her way out of the Great Hall.

Disgusting was what it was. Draco lounged on the large black leather sofa in the Slytherin common room. Downright revolting that when he should have fucked her right out of his system, she had only dug her claws in deeper and now he could barely focus on anything that wasn't Granger and her soft skin, her gasping breath, her sweet, warm—

"Mate, you really need to take it easy," Blaise commented as Draco turned the bottle of fire whisky up again, drinking down a mouthful. "That's your third bottle this week."

“What of it?” Draco snapped. ‘When I want your opinion, Blaise,’ he paused. “Wait, no. I’ll never want your opinion.”

Blaise shifted unhappily in his seat as Draco took another drink.

“Are you at least going to go?” Blaise asked, motioning down to the game of wizard’s chess between them.

Draco sighed and hauled himself forward. It was late and the common room was almost empty save for a few students still burning the midnight oil over some essay. He glanced down at the board. He wasn’t sure who was winning. He had started this bottle three games ago and it was getting increasingly lighter and his attention for the game had lessened with each swallow.

He picked up his Queen and stared at it. The white crown sat atop a perfect oval, stretching smoothly down a long curve to a heavy base. Granger had curved like this. Under her large sweaters she was hiding a surprisingly slender and smooth body. Her legs were long for her height and he wanted to run his hands all the way up them until he reached her warm center again. It probably tasted like vanilla and cinnamon...

“Draco!” Blaise said loudly.

Draco glared at him and slammed his Queen down where she shattered his dark Knight into pieces that went tumbling off the side of the board.

“Fuck,” Blaise muttered and ran his hand over his head. “Give me that.” He reached out for the bottle and Draco smirked as he handed it over. Blaise took a long drink and passed it back before turning his dark eyes to stare at the board in front of him again.

He felt like that black Knight right about now, scattered in broken bits. She was supposed to have been just another notch in his bedpost so why was he still thinking about how much he wanted to tie her to it and have his way with her again and again and again?

As soon as they had finished in the Library he expected to feel his normal sense of accomplishment and pride, but instead he found himself... disappointed. Disappointed that she was headed back to her common room and her completely separate life with her friends like Potter and... Weasley. The Weasel might have a girlfriend now, but that didn’t stop him from casting ever increasingly longer looks over to *his* Mudblood.

Draco’s lip curled and he drank down another swallow letting it burn inside him like the way she burned in his mind. She should be out of it by now; no other girl had taken up this much of his attention, especially after he’d had them. There were some, of course, that had deserved a repeat performance or two, but none of them had captured his interest like she was currently doing.

Pansy threw herself onto his lap and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Draco, won’t you come to bed? It’s cold,” she pouted, sticking out her bottom lip.

“Not now, Pans,” Draco said in a bored voice, pulled his head away from her. “Can’t you see I’m busy?”

He pushed her to the side and she landed on the sofa next to him with a small huff. Blaise reached forward and moved his Rook up, blocking one of Draco’s Pawns from its

progression.

"You're *always* busy these days," Pansy whined. 'Don't you miss me, Draco?' She leaned in close to him, running her hand up his leg. "Because I miss *you*," she whispered in his ear, bringing her hand to rest in between his legs.

Draco pushed her hand off of him. "I said," he growled. "I'm busy."

Pansy sat back, pouting again, and then glared at him. "Maybe I should find someone else to keep me warm, then."

"Theo's free," Draco commented, nodding across the room to where Theodore Nott sat at a table with Crabbe and Goyle. Pansy scoffed loudly as Draco leaned forward, grabbing his Queen again.

"You're mean when you drink," she finally said, a little hurt.

Draco didn't even bother to look at her. "I'm mean all the time."

Blaise snorted into his hand and Draco smirked at him. Pansy heaved herself up, shaking her head, but Draco noticed that she did in fact walk over to Theo, plopping down in the chair next to him. He rolled his eyes, not caring that she would probably be tossing in the other man's sheets when Draco finally descended the stairs down to their shared dormitory. Hell, Theo's first time had been when Draco shared Pansy with him so the fact that she thought she could make him jealous was simply laughable.

Jealousy was not a common emotion for Draco. He had to care about something in order to be jealous over it and none of the girls he had he could really say he *cared* about. But he had felt the sharp prick of jealousy a few times, in Quidditch mostly, but more recently in the Library when he saw McLaggen sitting there with Granger and then today in Defense Against the Dark Arts when Snape had reprimanded Weasley for not paying attention. She hadn't noticed, too engrossed in the lesson, but Draco had— Weasley had been watching her.

She was a good shag, an *amazing* fuck actually, and that's all this was. He was just wanted to get his dick wet so the fact that he kept thinking about how fucking good she had felt around him meant nothing more than just that. He'd give her a second go, and this time, he would purge her from his brain. Then he could get back to his work with a clear head and no more thoughts about her pink little nipples and the way her brows pulled together when he played with them.

He'd give it to her good and hard and then be done with her. He'd accomplish that goal and then he could finish his task in peace without hearing her little moans replaying over and over in his head. But the way his name sounded coming out of *her* mouth... Draco felt his pulse quicken and shoved his Queen forward across the board.

"Checkmate."

"No research!" Ginny slammed her hand down on the open book in Hermione's hand. 'No studying, no school work,' she commanded. "Tonight is for fun." Ginny pulled out a few bottles of Butterbeer and replaced the book with one of them.

Hermione smiled at her antics. Ginny bounced a little as she threw herself on Hermione's bed and cracked open her Butterbeer, taking a long drink from it.

"Ah, that's better," she said. "Okay so let me tell you what happened in Divination the other day..." Ginny started in on a story and Hermione leaned back against her pillow, sipping her Butterbeer as Ginny went into greater detail about Trelawney's prediction that she should be on the lookout for falls and she would be taking a big one sometime before the end of the year.

"Ridiculous," Ginny shook her long copper hair as she cracked open another Butterbeer. "What a complete bat she is. Do you want another?" She offered Hermione another bottle and she shook her head.

"I'm still working on mine, thanks," Hermione said looking at her half full bottle.

"Okay, but don't fall too far behind!" Ginny grinned and tucked her legs underneath her. Hermione took a long sip and held up her bottle to show her progress. "Keep it up," Ginny laughed and drank deeply herself.

They chatted for a while about different things, classes, teachers, and other students. Hermione felt herself relaxing and after another bottle of Butterbeer her laughter came easier. Lavender came in at one point and Ginny obviously rolled her eyes at her brother's girlfriend as she grabbed her bag from the foot of her bed.

"What are you two doing?" Lavender asked, wrinkling her nose a little.

"Just hanging—" Hermione started but Ginny cut her off.

"None of your business." She snapped and Lavender's brows shot up.

"You don't need to be so rude!"

"I know that." Ginny said easily and took a drink, staring straight at her.

Lavender glanced between them and pulled her bag further onto her shoulder. "I'm going to tell Ron you were mean to me."

Ginny laughed loudly. "Okay? And? What, you think he's going to come down all big brother on me?"

Lavender made a high pitched angry noise, glared at Hermione and then turned out of the room, stomping down the stairs out of the dormitory.

Hermione and Ginny's eyes met and they burst out into laughter.

"I don't know what Ron sees in her other than a willing partner," Ginny shook her head, her long red hair falling around her shoulders. "But I suppose it's my fault he's with her."

Hermione paused with the bottle halfway up to her lips. "What do you mean by that?"

Ginny took a breath and started. "He caught me and Dean snogging, right, and got all upset. Dean, of course, just stood there but I wasn't going to let him boss me around so I said he was only upset because he's the only one who hasn't snogged anyone out of all of us. I mean, even you had your thing with Krum and—"

“That was hardly a... thing,” Hermione said.

“Well it was more than Ron had,” Ginny continued. “Anyways he got even more upset once I said that—”

“Wait,” Hermione stopped her. “You said that? You mentioned me and Viktor?” Could this have been why he was so cold to her? Why he didn’t speak to her and then suddenly was all over Lavender?

“Yeah, and he deserved it for calling me out like that! Dean’s my boyfriend, well, for now at least—”

“Wait, what?!” Hermione’s head was spinning and the third bottle of Butterbeer was catching up to her.

“Yeah, that’s another reason why I wanted to have this little night,” Ginny admitted. “I’m thinking of calling it off with Dean.”

Hermione stared at her. She seemed to have missed quite a bit the last few weeks when she had been distracted by Malfoy.

“He doesn’t give me any air to breath,” Ginny went on. “Like take tonight, for instance, I told him I was hanging out with you and he gets in a mood because I’m doing something without him. I know we’ve been going out for a while, but I feel like he wants to act like we’re married sometimes and... I guess I’m just not that serious about him.”

Hermione tried to put all this new information into different compartments in her head. Everything with Ron and Viktor she could sort through when she had more time. Right now she needed to be there for Ginny who clearly needed to talk about what was going on with her and Dean. And it wasn’t like Hermione had been available to her much lately.

“I’ve sort of noticed you two a little,” Hermione admitted. “You seem a little annoyed by him sometimes.”

“That’s an understatement,” Ginny rolled her eyes and took the last sip of her Butterbeer. “He gets weirdly jealous at Quidditch practice too. I don’t think he likes that Harry and I are friends.” She frowned.

Hermione bit her lip to keep her words from coming forth and bit down on the exact spot that Malfoy had latched onto the previous night. She winced and let it go, quickly bringing the Butterbeer up and taking a deep drink in hopes to hide the pained expression that crossed her face for a second.

“You think so?” was all she offered the youngest Weasley as she sighed. She didn’t want to mention the things she’d noticed about Harry recently, unsure if he was ready to disclose his feelings or not. She and Ginny had a conversation the previous year about Harry where Hermione told her to try and move on from him when she knew that Harry’s attention was on Cho.

“It feels that way,” Ginny muttered, pulling at the label on her bottle. “But Harry’s just being friendly, right?” She looked up at Hermione, her brown flecked eyes clear and searching for an answer. “He doesn’t see me that way; to him I’m just Ron’s little sister,” she said a little dejectedly.

Hermione fought with herself for a moment over the right thing to say. “Maybe you should ask him.”

“Ha, yeah,” Ginny rolled her eyes. ‘I’m sure that will make practices even better— Hey, Harry, do you like me or is Dean just being a twat?’ She gave a small laugh. “We’re sure to win the Cup after that.”

Hermione couldn’t help but laugh. Maybe it was the absurdity of her comment or the Butterbeer or the fact that for just a moment, Ginny had reminded her so much of Ron the way she had said that, but Hermione lost herself in the fit of laughter to which Ginny couldn’t help but join in.

“That’ll be our winning strategy,” Ginny giggled. “Distracting the other team with our personal issues! Slytherin won’t stand a chance.”

Hermione’s laughter slowly died away. Quidditch. Slytherin. Malfoy. How did it always come back to Malfoy? She looked over at Ginny. Maybe she should share this with her. She had certainly opened up about her relationship and now seemed to feel a little bit better. Maybe Hermione would too if she shared what was going on between her and Malfoy?

“Are you hungry? I’m hungry.” Ginny stood up, using the bedpost to balance herself. She pulled Hermione up after her. “Let’s go down to the kitchens.”

They were giggling a little too loudly to try and fool anyone as they made their way down the last flight of stairs to the basement level of the castle. Hermione leaned on Ginny who was pulling her along saying, “Come on! We aren’t far now!” between hiccups and laughs.

“Okay! Okay!” Hermione tried to keep up with her. ‘But my feet keep getting in my way.’ She tried to steady herself and made it a few feet before Ginny let out a yelp and tumbled to the stone floor. Hermione was bent over in laughter as she asked, “Gin, are you okay?”

Ginny pushed herself up and blew a long lock of red hair out of her face. “Trelawney got lucky with that one,” she muttered and Hermione almost fell down beside her from laughing so hard.

“I guess there’s a first time for everything!” Hermione took a few steps forward clinging to the wall for support.

Ginny was struggling to get to her feet as Hermione rounded the corner and then... he was standing in front of her, silver grey eyes widened a little, surprised to see her there.

Hermione stopped laughing, stopped moving, stopped breathing and just stared up at him.

“Granger...” His mouth began to curve smugly. “Come for round two?”

His face fell suddenly and Hermione glanced behind her to see Ginny who had made it upright and was at her shoulder.

“Malfoy.” She said coldly, her laughter gone now too.

Malfoy’s expression turned nasty. “Well if it isn’t the Weaselette and the Mudblood, out for a nighttime stroll.” He sneered. “Now get out of my way.”

Ginny crossed her arms, teetering a little as she did so. "I don't see your name on this hallway." She glared at him.

Hermione looked quickly between them and bit her lip again. The Butterbeer had numbed the pain a little, making it just sensitive now. Malfoy's eyes cut from Ginny right to where her teeth were pressed in on it and she saw them gleam for a moment before she released it and cast her eyes down.

"Oh I've left my mark alright," he said in a low voice and Hermione felt herself blush furiously under his gaze that she couldn't meet.

"Gross." Ginny wrinkled her nose. "But what more should I expect from a slimy Slytherin like you?"

Hermione's heart was hammering in her chest. She wished that she had not drank that last Butterbeer, maybe she would be able to think of something else to do or say than just stand here feeling Malfoy's eyes on her.

"Oh, the things I've done would *shock* you."

Hermione's head shot up and she saw that Malfoy was smirking down at her. She took in a shaky breath and Malfoy held her gaze for a moment before glancing at Ginny, quickly raising his eyebrows and in one step he was past them, moving down the hallway towards the stairs.

"Dick." Ginny said darkly as he disappeared up the stairs and out of sight. Hermione looked quickly over to her and saw her expression was full of loathing. 'Our boys might get on our nerves but at least they're not like *him*. Such an asshole.' She muttered and took Hermione's hand in hers. "Come on, it's just up here."

Hermione let herself be led forward by Ginny deciding there was no way she could tell her about what she had done. Ginny might be understanding and willing to help if it was anyone else but Malfoy. She could imagine the look in Ginny's light brown eyes if she told her that she had slept with none other than the person who had seemed to make his life's mission to make fun of her family every chance that he got. No matter how Hermione would try and explain, there was no possible way she could ever make Ginny understand why she did what she had done.

Hermione glanced behind her at the dark empty hallway. She would have to deal with this on her own.

Draco flicked his wand and the curtain fell back over the Vanishing Cabinet. His eyes burned with exhaustion and he rubbed his forehead, trying to ease some of the pain that had built up in his skull after hours of toiling away and mending the miniscule broken parts of the Cabinet.

He swore once he was done with his task he was going to smash this thing, and its sister, into twigs. Then he was going to set them on fire and dance on the ashes. Well, maybe not dance. He didn't dance. Maybe piss on them instead.

He had made little progress tonight though and the reason was the same one it had been for too long— Granger. But that was soon to be remedied. If she would fucking look at him again, that is. He had wanted to get a rise out of her, something to let him know that she was feeling something too since he couldn't shut off whatever she had started in him. So he had flirted with Pansy, making sure that she saw.

Whatever. He liked to see her squirm. He thought about it often. Granger squirming, writhing, twisting underneath him. Her soft thighs up around him, her hands clinging onto him, her mouth open, gasping, moaning. And those eyes... Fuck he wanted to look right into them, into her *soul* as she came. For him. Around him.

Did Mudbloods have souls?

Draco tucked his wand back into his pocket and shrugged. It didn't matter.

But his display in the Great Hall had clearly upset her. He had known that as soon as she had run out of there, skirt flying around her thighs, and away from him. And other than the other night outside of the kitchens she had acted like nothing had happened between them.

It's not like she hadn't enjoyed herself, he had made sure of that. And he had taken it easy on her. Virgins... Draco shook his head as he made his way through the labyrinth that was the Room of Hidden Things. Normally he was a little annoyed by them and their hanging on after it was over, but Granger was an exception to the rule. Wasn't she always...

She might have been a virgin, but not anymore. Now she was his.

And he had decided that he wasn't quite done with her yet. No amount of ignoring him was going to change that fact. He slipped out of the door and into the seventh floor corridor where Goyle was standing there, wearing a second year's body as disguise. He had to stop himself from laughing as he dismissed him with a wave.

"Skip along back, Goyle," he smirked. "I've got a little more business to attend to."

Goyle glared back at him from the little girl's eyes before turning and heading in the opposite direction. Draco shook his head, pushed his hand through his hair, and headed for the Library.

He had checked here every night since that night, waiting for her to return and each night he had left a little angrier than the night before.

Where the fuck was she?

Did she... think she was too good for him? Somehow better? Is that why she hadn't come back? How could that bitch possibly think she was better than him? Was she waiting on him to come crawling to her? He'd show her crawling. He'd show her how it felt to crawl across the floor on her hands and knees, looking up at him with those bedroom eyes...

Draco grit his teeth and breathed in and out slowly until his pulse returned to a normal rate and the throbbing in his groin lessened. He pushed open the iron gate to the Restricted Section and strode in.

His feet carried him to the same small aisle that he had shoved Granger up against. He ran his hand over the bindings, the leather rougher than her skin and smelled thick and musty,

nothing like her cinnamon and vanilla. Merlin, he had gotten drunk off of it when he pushed his face in her hair and himself in her cunt.

He leaned his back against the shelves, resting his head and closing his eyes. It was late, he was beyond tired, and Granger wasn't coming again tonight. Deep down he thought he knew this, but had come here anyways. He sunk down to the floor, long legs stretched out in front of him as he took a long, deep breath. He reached in his pocket and pulled out the pair of white knickers he had taken from her, holding them tightly in his hand.

She was wrong if she thought ignoring him would just make him go away. Dead wrong. She could run, she could hide, but he would find her. Because he knew her now. He knew who she was, on the inside, because he'd *been* there.

Draco's fist shook around the little white knickers and he allowed himself three seconds to let the tremors pass through his body, uninhibited before he brought a cold calmness over himself again. He brought them up to his face and breathed in deeply, but not shaky like the others had been. No, this one was even and controlled. Then he tucked them carefully back into his pocket, leaned his head back against the old books and let sleep finally sink over him.

Hermione had never let anyone stop her from researching before and she wasn't about to let Malfoy be the first. Instead of spending late nights in the Library, she went there during her lunch break instead. She took as many books as Madam Pince would let her and holed up in the common room in the evenings, making sure she did not wander out for any reason.

She had come to the conclusion that she couldn't change what she had done with Malfoy, but she could make sure it didn't happen again. No matter how much she might want it to.

Ginny's reaction to him had been appropriate. Malfoy had shown time and time again that he was nothing more than a despicable wretch who didn't care about anyone or anything that wasn't himself. The fact that he seemed not to have any qualms about cheating on his girlfriend was only further proof of his contemptible nature.

She ran her fingers over the back of another book and pulled it from the shelf, adding it to the large stack that was hovering behind her. Sun streamed in through the large windows and although she knew it was bitterly cold outside, the castle was surprisingly warm on the inside and Hermione turned, counting the books up to twelve before she headed for the desk at the far end of the Library to check them out.

But she never made it there.

The stack of books tumbled to the floor loudly and Hermione spun around, curls flying and saw the stormy grey eyes of Draco Malfoy. She was surprised at the dark anger she found there and even more surprised when he took a step over the spilled books and shoved her roughly back into a study desk against the wall.

"What do you think you're—" she started.

"Me? What the fuck are you doing?" he asked in a dark voice.

Hermione looked up at him in outrage, trying to stand up straight again and Malfoy pushed her back once more.

“Don’t touch me again,” Hermione snapped, her hand dropping down to her waist where she could easily reach her wand if she needed to.

“Why not?” Malfoy looked down at her. “You know you want me to.”

“No I don’t.” Hermione tried to keep her voice even. She hadn’t let herself think of him in days and having him here in front of her again was making all of those thoughts come into sharp relief.

Malfoy tutted a few times and grazed his fingers over her wrist. “And why not?” he said in a softer voice. ‘Don’t try and tell me you didn’t like it, Granger.’ He leaned in close to her. “I can still hear you moaning.”

Hermione shoved him away from her and he chuckled as he took a few steps back. “Because you have a girlfriend, Malfoy,” she glared at him.

He tilted his head and his brows pulled together. The confusion on his face was almost... cute. The way his lips pulled ever so slightly to the side, his eyes tightened and sparked deep inside their grey haze. No. This was exactly why she was avoiding him. She pushed these thoughts from her head and glared at him, hating the way he made her feel.

“Girlfriend?” Malfoy gave a little laugh. ‘Well, I think we’ve finally found something you don’t know.’ Hermione stared up at him. “I don’t *do* girlfriends.” Malfoy said as if it was something obvious.

“I saw you with her.”

“Who?”

Hermione paused. “Pansy.”

Malfoy laughed.

Hermione felt the warmth of embarrassment creep up her neck and into her cheeks.

“Don’t try to deny it,” she hissed.

Malfoy let the last of his laughter fade before saying, “Pansy is not my girlfriend.”

Hermione blinked. “She’s... She’s not?”

Malfoy took a step back towards her. “No.”

She bit her lip, no longer tender after having a few days to heal. “Well are you sleeping with her?”

“Jealous?” Malfoy raised an eyebrow.

“No.” Hermione snapped. “I just...” She let out a short breath.

“Want me all to yourself?” Malfoy took another step and stopped a few inches in front of her.

“I...” She looked up at him.

Malfoy reached up and pushed her curls back from her face. “Because that’s what I want,” he said in a low voice. “All of you, just for me.”

Hermione's heart was pounding in her chest and she was worried that he would be able to hear it. His hand slowly drifted down her arm.

If he didn't have a girlfriend then was this as bad as she had tried to convince herself that it was? It's not like this was anything more than... what it was. And it never would be; like he said, he didn't do girlfriends and she certainly had no desire to ever *date* Draco Malfoy.

And she'd done it once already... what more could a second time do?

"Yeah," Malfoy smirked. "That is what you want, isn't it... kitten?"

Hermione's chest was rising and falling fast, trying to keep up with her racing heart. His hand trailed down to her wrist where he wrapped his long fingers around it then suddenly pulled it up, jerking her forward and into him.

She breathed in the smell of mint along with something deeper as well. Her stomach clenched and not at all in a bad way. She swallowed, trying to get her mind to stop spinning but she knew the only way it would was if she leaned into him, right now, and did what her body was begging her to do.

"Another rule," she said in the firmest voice she could muster and felt a low growl deep in Malfoy's chest. 'For both of us.' She clarified and Malfoy quieted, listening to her. "I won't... do anything with anyone else, if you don't either."

Malfoy was very still for a few moments. Her chocolate brown eyes searched his face over, looking for some inclination to the thoughts that lay beyond his misty grey eyes.

"Done." He said simply.

Hermione blinked in surprise. She had expected him to scoff or laugh at her or flat out refuse. She absolutely had not expected him to wrap his other arm around her middle and slam his lips down on hers, making her gasp and he took the opportunity between her open lips to slide his tongue in, moving it over hers smoothly before pulling back quickly, leaving Hermione, lips still parted and wet, trying to balance herself on unsteady legs.

"Tonight." Malfoy commanded.

"I can't tonight," Hermione said, finding that she was actually disappointed herself by this. "I promised Harry that I would help him with—"

"Potter?" he snarled. "I thought you just said you weren't fuc—"

"Harry is my *friend*," she cut him off.

"And I suppose Weasley is just a friend too?" Malfoy sneered.

Hermione opened her mouth then closed it. What was Ron to her now? "No." She finally said. "Ron's not my friend. Not anymore."

Malfoy's mouth twitched a little. "Seems like some of my good taste is rubbing off on you." Then added in a low voice, "Let's see what else I can rub off on you."

Her mouth felt very dry which was strange because she also felt like she might be drooling as she stared up at Malfoy. "This weekend?" she asked in a small voice.

“Meet me on the seventh floor landing,” Malfoy said quickly. “And this time, no knickers.”

Draco was distracted during their Apparition lesson so much that he didn’t even notice Potter sneaking up behind him as he argued with Crabbe about guarding the Room of Hidden Things again tonight. Both he and Goyle were unhappy that they had to drink Polyjuice potion so they wouldn’t be recognized and each time they complained more.

He accomplished very little as far as the lesson went, but knew that with the promise of Granger tonight nothing else really seemed to matter much. He had kept his promise to her, strangely enough, and not invited Pansy or anyone else back to his bed in the last few days and he felt himself near bursting because of it.

Well, she had wanted all of him for herself and tonight she was going to get him. He was going to sate himself of her, finally, and dig out her claws one by one until he was done and she was shaking. Then he would leave her and continue on just as he had before she had wandered into the Restricted Section and into his life months ago.

He spent the afternoon trying to distract himself by paging through his Father’s copy of *The Sacred Twenty-Eight* while Theo and Blaise argued about who were contenders for the next Quidditch World Cup. Crabbe and Goyle weren’t happy that he was making them work for him on a Saturday night, but he snapped at them sharply and they both slumped back, silent and sullen.

He flipped the page and landed on the Gaunt family. There weren’t any of them left, having died out a few generations before. Every year there were less and less Purebloods, even with new ones being born. It was hard to keep the bloodlines alive, not inter-bred, and above all, Pure.

The entry on the Gaunts went on for a surprisingly long time for not having any living members and Draco took a break once he reached the Greengrass line. This was a family he was more familiar with and intimately familiar with Daphne, Pansy’s best friend. Pansy had thrown a fit, and quite a few other items too, when she found Daphne in bed with him.

She had screeched like an owl until Draco had gotten up, took a hold of her and ordered her to be quiet. She obeyed and then fell into his arms like a rag doll. It was not the first or the last time Pansy had fallen prey to her jealousy. Recently she had latched herself onto Theo, who was always pleased with her attention, in order to try and teach him a lesson in ignoring her. Draco rolled his eyes as she climbed onto Theo’s lap across from him and wiggled her ass in his direction.

“Theo,” she cooed as she rubbed her hands over his chest.

“Yeah, baby?” Theo grinned up at her.

“I’m lonely,” she drew out the words. “Come keep me company.”

Theo’s grin spread and he threw Blaise an apologetic look and a shrug before lifting her with him as he stood up.

Pansy squealed and threw her arms around him, tossing her head back and laughing.

Theo took a few steps towards the stairs that led down to their dorm then paused and turned towards Draco.

“Care to join?” he asked, raising his eyebrows.

Draco looked between Theo and Pansy. It would hardly be the first time that he and Theo had shared her. Pansy leaned back and her dark eyes locked onto his.

“Yeah, Draco,” giving him a sly smile. “Come down with us,” she offered.

Draco turned back to the book in front of him. “Maybe next time,” he said in a bored tone.

“Draco...” Pansy sounded disappointed.

“Oh don’t worry, Pans,” Theo hefted her up farther on him and started down to their dorm. “I can take care of you all on my own.”

But Draco felt Pansy’s eyes on the back of his head until Theo’s footsteps faded down the stairs.

“You’re torturing the poor girl,” Blaise commented, throwing his feet up on the spot that Theo had abandoned.

“She’s not the one I’m going to be torturing tonight though,” Draco said as he flipped another page.

“What’s that mean?” Blaise asked, confused.

Draco looked up quickly. “Nothing.” He snapped. “Just that I’m not fucking her after Theo done with her, that’s all.” He tried to play it off but did not like that Granger was distracting him to the point of almost slipping up.

“Right,” Blaise said and watched Draco for a moment longer so he made sure to act extremely interested in the Lestranger family tree.

It was well into the evening and neither Pansy nor Theo had surfaced when Draco finally closed up the book and stood up, stretching out his long arms.

“Drink up, Crabbe,” He said and pulled out a small vial of lumpy brownish-grey potion from his robes and tossed it to the large boy. “Time to go.”

9. nine

Chapter 9

She pulled her sweater around her as she made her way up to the seventh floor. It was chilly this February evening and she could almost see her breath in front of her even within the castle walls. Hermione passed by a large torch and felt its heat on her face for a moment, wishing she were back in the common room in front of the fire with Crookshanks and a good book.

Just ahead she saw a young girl holding a cauldron much too big for her and Hermione quickened her pace forward.

“Hi there,” she said softly and the little girl looked up at her with wide eyes. “What are you doing all the way up here? Are you lost?”

The cauldron crashed to the ground making Hermione jump back in surprise. The little girl took no time at all darting past her and heading for the stairwell at the end of the corridor. Hermione sat the cauldron upright and turned back, worried that she had scared the little girl when she felt two strong arms snake around her body.

One wrapped over her chest, trapping her arm to her side and a cool hand closed over her mouth while the other slid around her stomach pinning her other arm down and hauling her back against something very firm and solid.

“Right on time,” Malfoy’s voice sounded in her ear. She struggled against his hold but it didn’t do much. ‘Keep wriggling like that, Granger,’ Malfoy growled. “A little to the left.”

“Malmoy!” Her words were muffled by his hand.

“Keep it down, at least until I get you inside, then you can scream all you want,” he whispered and she felt herself being hauled backwards into a room. It was dark in here and she couldn’t see anything but could feel Malfoy’s body against her and his strong arms holding her.

His hand reached for something at her waist and Hermione tried to jerk away again, but her attempt only brought a low chuckle from Malfoy. She felt something move and realized that he had just pulled her wand from her pocket before slowly removing his arm from around her middle and mouth.

She spun around and reached out in the darkness, hoping to grab hold of him and take her wand back, but her hands only closed over cold air. It was impossibly black in here and she couldn’t see anything, not even her own hands in front of her.

“Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder...” she murmured.

“Very good, Granger,” Malfoy drawled from somewhere off to the side of her and she spun, trying to find him.

“How can you see in this?” Hermione asked as she heard footsteps moving around her.

“I have my ways,” he said smoothly, his voice closer this time. Hermione turned in his direction and held out her hand again, not liking the helplessness she was feeling. “And you’re too cute to miss out on.”

Hermione glared into the darkness. “This isn’t funny.” She crossed her arms over her chest. She wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction anymore.

“Funny? No, I’m not joking.”

“Malfoy, I want to be able to see—”

She felt him grab onto her wrist and pull her hand down. “What about feel?” he said in a low voice and shoved her hand against his trousers where she felt something very hard and very long pressing against her palm.

Hermione pulled her hand back quickly. “Ugh! You’re such a... a...”

“At least I’m not a Mudblood,” his voice was in her ear and his body against her back again.

Hermione spun around and Malfoy caught her hair in his hand, forcing her head back as he pressed his lips down onto hers roughly. She gave a little groan, and pushed against his chest but Malfoy captured her bottom lip with his teeth again and Hermione froze as he breathed out through gritted teeth, “Behave.”

That one word sent shivers down her spine and she found herself doing just that. Her hands fell from his chest to hang by her sides and she relaxed the muscles in her neck so that she wasn’t pulling her head away from him anymore.

Malfoy let go of her lip and licked it with the tip of his tongue.

“Good girl.”

More shivers and these ones settled below her navel.

“Close your eyes.” Malfoy ordered. “Stay right here.” Hermione obeyed.

He released her and she heard him move off a distance then return. She could feel his breath against her lips and she breathed in the crisp mint scent.

“Open them.”

Hermione blinked her eyes open to find that she was in... a classroom. It was strangely empty with only one long desk and two chairs at it. But there weren’t any classrooms in this part of the castle, there was only...

“The Room of Requirement,” Hermione breathed out.

“Nothing gets past you,” Malfoy smirked down at her and she looked up into his hazy grey eyes. ‘Nothing except me.’ He reached his hand under her skirt and ran it up her leg. Hermione closed her eyes, letting herself get lost in the feeling of his fingers on her skin

when he stopped suddenly and she opened her eyes to see him frowning. "I told you no knickers."

"I..." Hermione breathed out. "I forgot."

Malfoy tutted a few times and shook his head, grey eyes narrowing. "Seems like you need to be taught a lesson."

Hermione looked up at him apprehensively and Malfoy's eyes gleamed down at her. He pulled back one of the chairs and sat down on it.

"Get over here." His voice was deep and commanding and Hermione found herself following it and her feet as they moved to stand in front of him.

Malfoy's eyes slid up and down her body before he reached out his long arms and grabbed her hips, pulling her forward. Hermione gasped and stumbled a little at the quick movement, but he held her in place easily.

"When you do what I tell you to," he said as his hands slid a little down on her. "You get rewarded. When you disobey me..." they moved back up to her waist. "You get punished."

"Punished?" Hermione barely got the word out before Malfoy had pulled her body down and over his knees. Hermione pushed her head up, curly hair falling around her face and tried to look up at him, but Malfoy had one hand on her back, holding her down while the other slid down over her ass then back and forth on the backs of her thighs.

"Malfoy, what are you—"

"No more questions." His hand came down on her ass, sending a shockwave through her. She let out a small gasp and was about to protest when he rubbed the spot where he had hit softly over her skirt and she realized what her punishment was going to be.

"Now," Malfoy said in that same low voice and his hand moved back to her thighs. 'I told you not to wear any knickers. And what did you do? Hmm?' he asked, pushing her skirt up some. "I'm waiting, Granger."

"I wore knickers." Hermione answered.

"You. Wore. Knickers." Malfoy said slowly and then ripped her skirt back over her waist. Hermione gasped again at the shock of the cold air against her skin, but Malfoy's hand was back, rubbing over her and squeezing her ass hard.

"Did you think I was joking? That this was a game?" he asked, running his hand down the back of one of her thighs to bring it back up the other one.

Hermione's stomach clenched pleurably. Why was this turning her on? Malfoy was talking down to her like she was a misbehaving child so why was she hoping he was going to slide his hand back up and in between her legs? Why was she aching for it?

"No," she answered.

"So you deliberately disobeyed me." His hand moved over her ass again. "Did you want to get punished?"

"No," Hermione said snappishly. His fingers curled around the band of her knickers.

“Do you want to now?” he asked with a hint of impishness in his tone.

She could feel her blood heating up under her skin. In a way, she was glad he couldn’t see her face right now and the blatant desire that was burning in her eyes.

“Yes.”

She felt his cock twitch against her stomach. Good Godric, she liked how that felt. Liked that she could provoke such a carnal reaction in him.

“And why’s that, my little Mudblood?”

Hermione pressed her lips together. She didn’t like the fact that she was almost beginning to enjoy being called Mudblood by him.

“Is it because you know you’re a dirty little slut that needs to be spanked?”

What was happening to her? Hermione was biting her lip, fighting against the heat that was creeping from her lower stomach to settle in between her legs.

Malfoy ripped her knickers down to her thighs and she let out a little yelp as his hand smacked down on her bare ass.

“Answer me!”

It burned. It stung. It... felt good. She clenched her muscles tightly together to keep from crying out and closed her eyes tightly. Malfoy rubbed his palm over her ass, stimulating the skin there to keep the sensation alive.

Hermione finally gathered enough of herself back together to speak. “Yes,” she breathed out. Yes, she wanted this. Wanted him. Wanted him to spank her again. Wanted to feel his hand come down hard against the soft skin and the pleasant buzz that radiated after.

“Yes...” Malfoy murmured and he shifted her on his lap so that his cock was pressed more into her. God, she wanted that too. ‘But you’re not just any little slut, are you?’ He said as he ran his hand down her legs and then back up again. “You’re my little slut.”

He ripped her knickers down to her knees and smacked her ass again. The crack of it echoed around the empty classroom and this time Hermione could not stop the short cry from coming out.

“Oh did that hurt?” Malfoy cooed as he rubbed her burning ass cheek.

Hermione nodded, tawny curls tossing with her head. “Mmm-hmm.”

“Good.”

Again and again, alternating cheeks, Malfoy’s hand struck her sensitive skin. She gritted her teeth, only letting out a small whimper every now and then as he continued on with apparently no intent on stopping.

Malfoy’s force increased. She could feel the skin warming under his hand, getting tender, softer, more sensitive with each strike. She tensed and Malfoy noticed, pressing her down harder as he continued his assault on her bare skin.

Hermione was screaming, twisting, crying. Malfoy was merciless, his palm hot against her skin as he slapped it harder and harder until she could feel the metal of his ring biting into her.

"Malfoy! Please!" Hermione cried out, bracing herself for the next strike, but it did not come.

She could hear him breathing hard. Her muscles twitched, trying to ready themselves, but when his hand landed on her this time, it was soft and gentle. His palm moved over her raw flesh, caressing it, massaging it until the pain turned into something deeper. It was so tender and he moved his hand over it with a gentle grace.

Hermione slowly began to catch her breath, gulping down air as she listened to her heartbeat begin to slow down.

"Beautiful," he murmured as his hand slid over her again. "You did beautifully, pet."

Hermione felt torn. Part of her knew that had gone farther than she was comfortable with. The things he said, the force behind his hand... but then why had she enjoyed it? If it was wrong then why was she secretly hoping for one more smack?

"Your ass looks like a masterpiece," Malfoy said in a low voice and dragged his short nails over one of her cheeks causing her to hiss out as the tender skin flared to life. "I wish you could see it. The shade, it's..." he let out a low breath. "Gryffindor red."

Hermione giggled a little, smiling to herself under her mess of tangled hair. She bet it was. It felt like it was on fire and the only thing keeping it under control were Malfoy's cool strokes of his palm as he rubbed it softly over her.

"Like that, do you?" Malfoy chuckled himself and gave her that last playful smack she had been secretly wishing for.

"Oh!" Hermione gasped out and squeezed her thighs together as another pulse of heat pumped through her. Malfoy's hand moved down and slipped in between her legs. "Ohh..."

"Yeah, you fucking loved it," Malfoy gave another low chuckle as he slipped his fingers in between her fold. "Mmm, so wet," he murmured and pushed them in a little farther.

"Malfoy..." Hermione said his name softly. The feeling of his fingers moving leisurely back and forth with the tingling sting left from his spanking was making her get lost in a cloud of arousal.

"See if you wouldn't have worn knickers I would have made you come like this," Malfoy said. 'But since you did, you'll only get to come once and that,' he pulled his fingers from her and grabbed her around the waist, lifting her up and tossing her on the desk behind them. "Is going to be from my cock."

Hermione looked up from her supine position on the desk to see the dark lust filled eyes of Malfoy staring back down at her. Her knickers were long gone and her skirt was still up around her waist. His breathing was speeding up as he looked down at her, his eyes slowly moving down her body.

He grabbed her knees and pulled her legs apart making a noise halfway between a hiss and a groan as his hazy grey eyes landed in the center of them.

Hermione shifted a little on the desk, feeling awkward about being so exposed.

“Don’t.” He said it in that deep dominant voice, glancing up at her for a moment before letting his gaze drop back down.

She laid still then and let him drink his fill of the sight in front of him, staring at the ceiling and trying to remember how to breathe normally.

“Such a pretty little pussy,” he said in a hoarse voice and Hermione felt his fingers graze along it. She fought against the moan that wanted to come out and closed her eyes, leaning her head back. “Open your shirt.”

Her hands landed on each button, pulling it open as Malfoy watched more of her skin being exposed for him. She pulled her shirt open and looked up at him for her next instructions. He was right about her, she did like being told what to do. She liked that he directed her and pushed her boundaries, pressing her to do things she would never have done, but somehow knew she secretly wanted to.

Malfoy pulled open his trousers and pushed them down far enough to pull himself out, stroking his cock slowly as he stared down at her with a curious expression on his face.

Finally he brought his eyes up to meet hers. She was surprised at how nervous she felt, as if he had just appraised her. “How’s that ass feel?” He grinned.

The desk was rough against it, but at least it was cool. “Sore,” she admitted.

“Yeah, the rest of you is about to be too.” Malfoy grabbed her legs and pulled them around himself. Hermione breathed in sharply as she felt his cock slide over her. Malfoy held it in his hand and brought it down against her a few times. ‘Don’t worry, Granger,’ he said, still grinning. “You’ve had your punishment for the evening. I’ll make this feel good for you.”

He pressed against her entrance and slid in. Hermione grabbed the sides of the desk, bracing herself against the pressure of him inside her.

“Oh fuck, Granger,” Malfoy groaned as he pushed more of himself in her. “God, your pussy feels good.”

He thrust in her a few more times, speeding up as he did so until he was pumping himself in her at a steady pace. His hands were on her hips, pulling her towards him as his hips slammed into her, pushing himself into her heat as the sound of skin slapping together filled the empty classroom.

Hermione’s breathing was heavy and turned into small moans as he drove himself into her, leaning his head back and sucking down his own large breaths. His hands moved from her waist to behind her knees and he pulled her legs up to rest on his shoulders, leaning farther over her and groaning loudly as he reached a new depth in her.

Hermione cried out sharply, unable to hold it back as he filled her, pushing himself deeper into her. She grabbed onto the edges of the desk; now that he wasn’t holding her down, her body was shifting with the force of his movement. Malfoy grabbed her wrists and held them to each side of her, pulling her arms down as a way of pulling her back towards him.

“So fucking tight,” he grunted. “So wet for me.”

Hermione was losing control of herself. She was trying to stay still like he had told her last time, but her hips were moving, meeting his movements and she couldn't stop because every time they crashed it sent a wave of pleasure through her blood all the way up to her fogged brain that was shutting everything down that wasn't the feeling Malfoy was giving her.

"Fuck yeah, Granger," Malfoy growled. "Fuck me back!"

Hermione let loose. She let her body do what it so badly wanted and was rewarded with fiery thrills going off inside of her. She felt her muscles tighten and Malfoy groaned again as he drove himself on, pushing harder, faster, deeper in her.

"Come." He ordered in that controlled voice again. How he was in control of anything right now, Hermione had no idea because she was lost in a swirl of chaos, but Malfoy certainly was not as he leaned slightly forward, increasing his pressure on her. "Come on my dick."

She didn't need the order, but she followed it. Hermione's body began to tremble and shake and she wondered if she would be able to contain her bones in it much longer because they felt like they might just vibrate right out of her. She cried out, arching her back as something extraordinary overwhelmed her, blocking out everything and everyone, except Malfoy, Malfoy, Malfoy...

"Draco..." she moaned softly and collapsed back onto the desk, head falling to the side and into her tangled curls.

"Oh shit, oh shit!" Malfoy pulled himself from her and swallowed a deep breath. Hermione looked up at him through half closed lids to see him stroking himself with one hand, the other grabbing onto her leg over his shoulder and his cock spurting itself over the length of her.

Malfoy groaned again, almost using her leg to hold himself steady for a moment as he breathed heavily, coaxing a few last drops from himself onto her thigh.

She laid her head back on the desk, letting her body come back down and her brain turn back on.

She glanced back up at him and saw him staring down at her exposed body with a look of awe on his face.

"My wand," she said softly, pushing herself up on her elbows.

"What?" he asked, still dazed.

"My wand, Drac—" Hermione caught herself, but not before his grey eyes shot to hers. "Malfoy. My wand so I can clean—"

He pulled his wand out of his back pocket and waved it over her, erasing the evidence of himself on her before tucking it back in and pulling out hers. Hermione sat up and felt her head spin a little. She pushed her skirt back down and started buttoning up her shirt as Malfoy adjusted himself back into his trousers.

She slid off the desk and onto legs she could barely feel before saying, "I still need my—"

Malfoy crashed his lips onto hers, kissing her roughly, urgently, but with a precision that impressed her. His hand wrapped around the side and back of her neck and his thumb pushed her chin up towards him. Hermione kissed him back, opening her mouth to slip her tongue out and let it taste his before he pulled back and swallowed hard.

“Your wand,” he said hoarsely and Hermione opened her eyes to see him staring down at her with her wand in his hand. She tucked it safely away in her pocket.

Malfoy looked at her for a moment longer from behind guarded eyes then turned to leave.

“Any rules for next time?” Hermione had said the words as soon as she had thought them.

Malfoy turned and smirked at her from over his shoulder. “I’ll let you know, pet.”

Hermione flipped a few pages of the book she was balancing in her arms as she tried to read and walk down the corridor to Ancient Runes. Students passed by and she pulled the book up farther, trying to find the section on cursed artifacts, hoping there might be some mention of horcruxes somewhere in there. She hadn’t had much luck with her research so far and was getting increasingly disturbed by the things she had found instead.

She saw something move over the top of her book and looked up just in time to stop before she ran into the arm that had shot out in front of her, hand landing on the stone wall and blocking her path. Cormac McLaggen leaned in front of her, smugly smiling down at her.

“Hey there, Granger,” Cormac said as Hermione slowly lowered her book from her face. “Haven’t seen you around in a while.”

“I’ve been busy,” she said, trying to sound civil, but direct. She didn’t have any time for Cormac what with schoolwork, research on horcruxes, and trying to maintain normal relationships with her friends. Not to mention whatever it was that she had with Malfoy. *Did* they have something? This was all so foreign to her.

“That’s why I wanted to talk to you,” Cormac smiled again and Hermione returned it flatly. “What are you doing for Valentine’s day?” His blue eyes shone brightly.

Valentine’s day? She hadn’t even given the holiday a single thought with everything else going on. There were much more important things than planning a date for that silly day such as her research to help Harry and she needed to make a new study schedule to prepare for end of year exams. They were a while away, but she didn’t want to fall behind.

“I had a feeling you might be free,” Cormac went on, clearly taking the blank expression on her face in place of an answer. “Let’s lock down plans.”

Hermione gave him a frowning smile. She had never really turned anyone down before. Things with her and Viktor had just kind of... fizzled out. They still exchanged letters occasionally, but just as friends. Then of course things with Ron had spiraled too fast for them to even have had a conversation about maybe being more than friends and Malfoy... Well, Malfoy was Malfoy and there wasn’t anything real there. It was just—

“Cormac, look,” Hermione started, closing her book and tried to shove it in her already full bag. “I’m really flattered that you thought of me, but—”

“Come on,” he took a step closer to her. “You don’t really want to spend the evening shut up with a musty old book do you? Not when you can spend it with me.” He tilted his head in what he must have thought was an endearing way.

Hermione grimaced. “I really am busy though, and—”

He grabbed her hand and Hermione glanced down at it as he twisted his fingers with hers. “You sort of owe me a date though,” he said and she looked back up at him. “We never finished ours at Slughorn’s party.”

“Cormac—”

“Valentine’s is this coming Saturday and I know you’ll have more fun with me than working on your ‘special project’ with Malfoy.”

Her eyes widened a little and she swallowed dryly before saying, “I don’t think—”

“You know you want to.” Cormac released her hand and gave her a wink before leaving her standing in the corridor. Hermione looked around and caught the eye of Parvati Patil before quickly looking away. Parvati was watching her with interest and Hermione wondered if the other girl had heard the conversation.

She heaved her heavy bag farther onto her shoulder and walked quickly the rest of the way to Ancient Runes.

Professor Babbling was talking quickly and Hermione’s quill flew across the page as she took notes, furiously focusing on the lesson. She had to. If she let her mind wander she wasn’t sure where it would take her right now. Probably back down into the recesses of her mind where Malfoy was waiting for her.

She could still feel his hand coming down hard against her skin and the sweet sting of his palm again and again. She shifted in her seat, crossing her legs.

There was something... exciting about doing something that she knew was wrong. After years of following and enforcing every rule it was a little appealing to misbehave. And the fact that no one knew, that it was just a secret between her and Malfoy, well... that made it all the more thrilling.

Her quill stilled and Hermione pressed her lips together before she risked it and glanced over to where Malfoy was sitting. He had his arms crossed over his chest and a dark expression on his face. Normally he was very well put together, clothes pressed and hair combed back, but today he looked... rough. His shirt was wrinkled and his tie loose around his neck. A few locks of white blonde hair fell over his forehead and his lids hung heavily over his rain grey eyes.

He looked so different than he had a few days ago, but still his demeanor was calm and composed. Something might be going on with him, but he was still controlling himself meticulously.

Then his cool grey lifted and met hers. His expression was guarded, as it always was, but she was surprised when she saw it tighten in annoyance. His eyes darkened and his lids lowered slightly before he cast his eyes back to the front of the classroom as if nothing had happened.

Hermione turned back around and frowned down at her notes. What was that about?

Draco ignored everything around him, letting himself sink down into his dark thoughts. Having Granger again had been... incredible. There was no other way to put it. He had fantasized about her many times, but those paled in comparison to what it was like to actually have her. He had meant this to be a one-time thing, get it out of his system and move on but it hadn't worked out that way and after this past weekend... well, Draco had resigned himself to the fact that he wasn't going to be done with her for a while.

She was delectable. A lifetime of following the rules had given her a beautiful submissive nature but that fiery Gryffindor streak combined with it was simply perfection. Granger was his. And until he was finished with her he wasn't going to share her with anyone.

So when he had seen fucking Cormac McLaggen holding her fucking hand in the corridor something dangerous had slithered around him, coiling tighter until all he could hear was his hot blood pumping in his ears. He had wanted to curse that stupid little smile off his stupid little face, but as Draco gripped his wand, McLaggen had let go of her hand and walked off, saving his sorry ass from a face full of boils.

If she had been a Slytherin, a Pureblood, Draco would have made sure the entire school knew that Granger belonged to him and him alone. That she was off limits, out of bounds, *taken*. But she wasn't. She was a Gryffindor and a Mudblood. So he couldn't exactly mark his territory out in the open, even if she was *his* Mudblood.

Draco shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked heavily down the stairs. Granger was already at the base, headed to the Great Hall for dinner where she would take her place at the Gryffindor table with all her little goody-good friends and talk and laugh and smile at them. He scowled. If he had his way he would pull her down into the dungeons with him, shove her onto his bed and have *her* for dinner.

He sank down into his seat, glaring at the golden plate in front of him. Crabbe and Goyle were already shoveling food onto their plates but Draco found that he didn't have much of an appetite tonight, at least not for the roast chicken in front of him. He did however, find a hunger for something else.

"Goyle, Crabbe," Draco said in a low voice and they looked up at him. "We're doing something special tonight." His grey eyes glittered dangerously.

"Come on, Draco," Goyle groaned. "I'm tired of guard duty."

The corner of Draco's mouth turned up slightly. "Trust me, you're going to like this."

Crabbe and Goyle shared a look and grins began to spread across their large faces.

"Eat up, boys," Draco instructed. "You're going to need your strength for this."

Crabbe grabbed the whole chicken with both hands, pulling it onto his already full plate. Draco chuckled at this and he lifted his head to look over at the Gryffindor table. Granger was sitting with Potter, talking and smiling at each other. Her coffee colored curls fell around her face as she turned more towards Potter, crossing her legs like she had in class today. He

smirked, knowing that under the skirt there were the marks he had left on her. Maybe no one else could see that Granger belonged to him, but at least he knew she could still feel it.

She could sit there with Saint Potter and pretend she was just like him, but he knew the truth. Next time, and oh yes, there would be a next time, he was going to show her just how unlike her sweet little friends she really was, the little slut.

With a satisfied smirk, Draco's eyes moved down the table, past Weasley and Brown who were eating each other's faces, to... McLaggen. He might not be able to tell the world that Granger belonged to him, but he could show one person that they had no chance with her. No chance at all.

He glanced back at her for just a second and saw her deep brown eyes on him again. Draco let her watch him for a moment and she shifted nervously in her seat. How long had she already been watching him? What was she thinking of in that little head of hers? Draco would have liked it to have been dirty thoughts of him, but the look of nervousness on her face told him otherwise. He wasn't worried though, there was no way that such a good little girl like her could figure out the dark thoughts that he was planning for his evening's entertainment.

Draco leaned against the cool stone, arms crossed over his chest and waited in the darkened alcove. He could hear Crabbe and Goyle shuffling around from their hiding spot a little way down the corridor and rolled his eyes.

Idiots.

Half the time he didn't even know why he kept them around, but good help was hard to come by and they were easily convinced. There weren't many people who would drink Polyjuice potion almost every night and stand guard with only an open line of credit at Honeydukes as thanks. At least they were cheap.

Draco scowled. Where was McLaggen? He should have come down this way by now and since he had given Crabbe and Goyle the night off after this little escapade, he planned on spending his own free evening drowning himself in the bottle of fire whisky Theo had smuggled in. If Filch thought he was watching all the routes in and out of the castle he was sadly mistaken and gold opened many doors, some of them hidden.

He felt adrenaline course into her fingertips and down his legs. He liked to hunt. He used to go with his father all the time. His pack of hunting hounds was unmatched. He trained them from pups, only keeping the best and brightest of the litters and discarding the rest. Turning them into beasts who could savage a stag in seconds, but retreated at the simplest command from him. Crabbe and Goyle were poor substitutes for his prized pets. He missed going on hunts; they were some of the only times when his father tolerated him. The familiar twisting of anticipation curled in him as he waited for his latest quarry to wander into his trap.

It wasn't much longer before Draco heard footsteps coming down the corridor and peered around the side of the alcove he had tucked himself into. The curly blonde hair of McLaggen came into view and Draco's scowl turned into a smirk.

McLaggen was a bigger idiot than Crabbe and Goyle combined if he thought that Granger would be spending an evening on his arm. No. She wasn't going to *touch* another man, not

while he had anything to say about it. He did have a say and Granger was so good at doing what she was told. Draco's smirk widened right before he stepped out into the corridor.

"Hello, McLaggen."

McLaggen stopped short and his face curled up as he recognized Draco.

"Malfoy," McLaggen glanced around. "What are you doing?"

Crabbe and Goyle appeared on either side of Draco and he let himself enjoy the uneasiness on McLaggen's face.

"What... What's going on here?" McLaggen said, voice raised, as he took a step back.

"No use in running, McLaggen," Draco said smoothly as he pulled his wand out from his robes.

"Stay back," McLaggen's voice had a wonderful hint of fear in it.

"No, I don't think I will," Draco said in a low voice, taking a step towards his prey.

McLaggen glanced down the corridor the way he had come, trying to find a way out of this, but Draco had chosen his position well. There was no way that McLaggen would be able to make it back to the stairwell and then up it before Draco either caught him or cursed him.

"What do you want?" McLaggen asked and Draco saw a faint sheen of nervous sweat on his forehead as the Slytherins pressed in closer to him.

"You're asking a lot of questions for someone who doesn't like to listen."

"What are you talking about?" McLaggen backed up another few steps.

Draco merely tilted his head. "It's almost a shame I have to mess up that pretty face of yours, McLaggen. Without it, I don't think many girls will be interested. Your personality certainly won't be able to make up for it. Looks like you won't have a date for Valentine's day after all."

"Valentine's day..." McLaggen was breathing heavily. "Wait... Is this about—"

Draco slammed his fist into McLaggen's mouth before Granger's name could come out of it. The Gryffindor fell back, clutching his mouth as blood ran down his chin.

"What the fuck, Malfoy?!" McLaggen looked up at him from the ground as Draco advanced on him, grey eyes cold.

He kicked out at him, his foot connecting with McLaggen's stomach and the sound of his painful grunt was like music to Draco's ears. Already, he felt soothed by the choking gasps as McLaggen tried to force air back into his body.

Draco crouched down next to him, leaning his face in close. "Leave her alone."

McLaggen's stared up at Draco, fear clear in his hazel eyes. "This..." he forced out, "This is about... Granger?"

Draco growled as her name passed through his lips. "Leave. Her. Alone. She's not for you." He said through gritted teeth, low enough that Crabbe and Goyle could not hear them.

“Fine, okay! Whatever you say Malfoy,” McLaggen gasped, pressing his hand on the floor and trying to push himself up.

Malfoy grinned nastily as he stood up and brushed his hands off. “Well, we got that cleared up easily enough,” he said cheerily.

McLaggen coughed a few times and tried to stand.

Draco placed his foot on McLaggen’s hand.

The Gryffindor looked up at him, confused.

“But the fact that remains that you touched what doesn’t belong to you,” Draco said in a cool voice, slowly putting weight down on McLaggen’s hand.

“Malfoy,” McLaggen winced. “Please! I’m a Keeper! I need my—”

Draco pressed down harder and McLaggen cried out in pain.

“Please, Malfoy,” McLaggen begged. “Don’t—”

Draco closed his eyes and smiled as he heard the crunch of broken bones and then the anguished cry that escaped McLaggen. He took his foot off the mangled hand and McLaggen pulled it up against his chest, cradling it.

He could let him go. He looked down at the pathetic whimpering excuse for a human at his feet. McLaggen had learned his lesson and Draco doubted that he would even look in Granger’s direction now, let alone speak to her. But just in case he forgot...

“All right, boys,” Draco chuckled as Crabbe and Goyle appeared at his sides. Crabbe cracked his knuckles and Goyle’s dark eyes gleamed. Draco’s smirk spread wide over his face. “Get to work.”

Hermione held her book to her chest as she descended the stairs down from her dormitory and back into the common room. She stopped at the bottom of the stairs as loud voices reached her.

“I can’t believe you haven’t planned anything!” Lavender shouted.

“Just because I haven’t doesn’t mean I won’t!” Ron argued.

“You don’t care about me!” Lavender said as fat tears welled up in her eyes. “If you did you would have planned out a special night for us weeks ago!”

“I do care!” Ron reached a hand out to her. “There’s still plenty of time!”

Lavender shook her head, blonde curls shaking around her. “How... How are you even going to get me a gift by this weekend?” Her cheeks turned red. “Some boyfriend you are!”

“Lavender!” Ron called after her as she pushed past Hermione, tearing up the stairs.

Hermione stood very still; staring up after her before slowly turning and saw that Ron was looking right at her.

"I suppose you loved that, didn't you?" he snarled.

She blinked and took a deep breath. "No, actually," she answered truthfully. As disappointed as she was with Ron, she still didn't want to see him unhappy.

Ron's face changed from angry to... tired. He sighed and sunk onto the couch in front of the fireplace.

Hesitantly, Hermione took a few steps forward and then, with a surge of old emotions picked her way over and sat down next to him on the couch. They didn't speak for a few moments as Hermione held her book closely against her and Ron ran his hand through his bright red hair and let out a low breath.

"Lavender is..." Hermione began, trying to find words to comfort him, but surprised at how difficult it was.

"Crazy," Ron muttered.

He glanced over and caught her eye. For a moment she saw the same boy she had been friends with for years in the bright blue looking back at her. The same boy who made her laugh, who stood up for her, who argued back with her even when he knew it was a losing battle... She missed him.

"I'm sure she'll forgive you once you show up with flowers and... a giant teddy bear or something."

Ron gave a small laugh. "Yeah... but it seems we spend half our time making up these days."

Something in Hermione jumped to attention. She wasn't entirely sure what to say to that. It wasn't like Ron and her were on speaking terms really and she didn't really want to hear the details of their relationship. Even if it was maybe starting to fall apart.

"But I guess it's better than being alone, right?" Ron asked as he leaned back into the couch. "Shit, sorry, Hermione, I didn't mean..." He rubbed his hand over his face.

She looked over at Ron. He had been careless with her feelings and said and done hurtful things, but he was still the same person who she had been best friends with.

"You know that's the first apology I've gotten from you all year," Hermione said before she could stop herself.

Ron quickly looked over at her, his blue eyes clear. His mouth fell open slightly and she noticed the way the firelight played off of the bright copper of his hair.

"I never meant to..." Ron started and then trailed off. "It just sort of... happened, you know?"

"I know," Hermione said softly and she did know. How could she blame Ron for kissing Lavender when that same night she had almost kissed Malfoy? Honestly, which was worse? She understood that sometimes, things like this just... happened. Just like Ron said. It was an easier excuse than dealing with the foreign feelings she was having, and avoiding, for a certain Slytherin.

Ron turned towards her. "Hermione, I—"

"Oh My God!" Lavender's shrill voice cut into the air between Ron and Hermione. "What is this?!"

Hermione jumped up off the couch, holding her book tightly against her.

Ron looked up between the two girls. "Lav, it's not what it looks like—"

"Not what it looks like?!" she hissed. "You think I don't know what's going on? You think I don't see the way you look at her?"

Hermione's heart stopped beating.

"I told you it's not like that!" He argued.

Lavender scoffed loudly. "I might not be in Ravenclaw but that doesn't mean I'm stupid!"

"Lavender—" Ron started.

"Oh so now you know my name," Lavender glared at him. "Because you said hers last night!"

Hermione stopped breathing.

Ron's eyes cut over to her and he held them there for a moment, the truth undeniable in them.

"I can't believe this!" Lavender screeched and stormed past them, heading for the portrait hole.

Ron cast one long glance back at Hermione before running after her. "Lavender!"

Ron and Lavender disappeared through the portrait hole as Neville came through it.

Hermione was still staring after them as Neville made his way over to her.

"Hermione, did you hear?" he asked quickly.

"What?" Hermione asked, only half paying attention to him.

"Cormac McLaggen was attacked," Neville said seriously.

"What?" Hermione gasped.

"He's in the hospital wing," Neville went on. "I just came in from helping Professor Sprout harvest more Dittany. I saw him when we brought it up to Madam Pomfrey."

"But... who would do something like that?" she asked, nonplussed.

"I don't know, but whoever did messed him up bad." Neville's expression was dark. "It's getting dangerous out there, Hermione," he added seriously.

Hermione's head hurt. She had spent too much time and energy worrying about her own personal life when she should be putting more energy into researching Horcruxes for Harry. There were more important things than boys and relationships, weren't there?

Too many thoughts. She desperately wanted to shut her brain off for a little while. To let it rest, give it a reprieve. The Daily Prophet was full of reports of senseless attacks, but to have one here at Hogwarts... She wanted to not think about this; Cormac, Ron, Death Eaters. She wanted... Malfoy.

Malfoy.

Malfoy's dark expression in class.

Malfoy's staring at Cormac during dinner...

Suddenly, she knew who had attacked him, who had hurt him, who had done those awful things to him. Her hand twitched on her book, gripping it tighter. And more importantly, she knew why.

10. ten

Chapter 10

“You complete ass!” Hermione hissed as she pushed her hands into Malfoy’s chest.

He didn’t move. Not an inch.

“For the last time, I barely touched him!” Malfoy sighed and rolled his eyes. “He must have fallen down some stairs or something.”

Hermione crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes. “Is that what you did to him? Push him down the stairs?”

“No!” Malfoy protested.

“So his hand just broke itself then,” Hermione countered.

Malfoy dropped his gaze to the dark floor between them. “Shouldn’t have touched you,” he mumbled.

“Excuse me?” Hermione snapped. “Touched me? When did he touch me? And even if he did—”

Malfoy’s eyes lifted back up to hers and burned like ash covered coals. “Oh he did. I saw you.” He took a step closer to her. “In the hallway, before Runes.”

“Before...” Hermione tried to think back. Cormac had stopped her in the hallway and asked if to go out with him on Valentine’s and... he had held her hand for a moment. “You broke his hand because he touched mine? Are you *insane*?!”

Malfoy glowered down at her. “I must be,” he snarled. “If I’m fucking a dirty Mudblood like you I must be out of my goddamn mind.”

She was *not* going to take this. “Yeah, well, you’re not anymore.” Hermione retorted.

“Bullshit.”

He grabbed her arms and shoved her back into the cold stone wall and his mouth found hers before she could utter a word of disagreement. She twisted against him, but Malfoy’s hands were firm on her and his grip strong, digging in deeper the more she struggled.

Gradually she found herself kissing him back. God, she hated herself for it, but couldn’t stop from moving her lips to meet his and tilting her head back just a little farther so he could press down harder. Malfoy gave a small moan and his grip on her changed. One hand slid up over her neck and the other lower, pulling her hips forward to meet his.

“You were saying?” he murmured in her ear as his lips softly brushed against the shell of it.

"You're a complete ass," she managed, trying to gather up the scraps of her dignity.

"Well that must be a turn on for you because you're shaking, Granger."

He pulled back far enough that she could see that devilishly handsome smirk on his face.

"With *rage*," she glared at him.

Malfoy chuckled. "Well, whatever it is, I like it." He nipped at her lip and Hermione pulled her head back away from him. His hand moved down from her neck and over her breast. He grasped it roughly, pressing it up and squeezing it. "And you like this."

Hermione hadn't noticed that her brows had pulled together and her lips had parted as short breaths moved through them. She hadn't noticed that her hands had moved themselves to rest on Malfoy's chest, slowly curling his shirt in her fingers. All she had noticed was the way his hand felt on her as he massaged her breast through her shirt with increasing pressure.

"So since you're free this weekend, how about giving me a go on these?" Malfoy grinned down at her.

Hermione came to her senses and shoved him back again and this time managed to move him far back enough that she slipped out from between him and the wall.

"I'm not," she snapped. 'Like I told Cormac and now telling you,' she said as Malfoy's eyes narrowed. "I've got things to do."

"Damn right you do." Malfoy smirked. "Now get over here and do them."

She scoffed and took a few steps back. "You can't just order me around!"

"I can't?" Malfoy took a long step forward. "Let's take another look at your ass and see what it has to say about that."

She wanted this fluttering to stop. "Stop it! Just... stop it," she shook her head. He was confusing her. He had hurt Cormac, he had done that and she knew it, despite him denying it. He was rough with her and called her names. Why... why was she okay with this? Why did she... want this? Why did part of her want him to grab her and kiss her again?

"Granger..." His voice was low and had a tint of... was that concern in it?

"Just leave me alone," Hermione said softly and turned away from him. She didn't look back over her shoulder. She didn't need to in order to know that Malfoy's calculating eyes were watching her; the way her legs shook just a little with each quick step, her stiff shoulders thrown back as she tried her best to keep her head high, and her hands curled into fists at her sides. She could feel his gaze on her until she reached the end of the corridor and ducked around the corner before breaking out into a run.

Hermione spent Valentine's in the Library with Harry, pouring over books and scrolls. She couldn't sort through her feelings about Malfoy, but she could page through book after book meticulously looking for any scrap of information on horcruxes. Harry had another lesson with Dumbledore and once he told her about it, both of them devoted themselves to research. Harry had even gone as far to leave the Prince's old potion book in his dormitory.

She read about curses, magical objects, enchanted artifacts, and all varieties of dark magic before she looked up to see the crescent of the moon shining brightly through the window across from her. How long had they been in here? She tried to remember if they had even taken a break to eat. Her head was so full she couldn't even remember.

Harry closed the book in front of him and took his glasses off, rubbing his eyes and pressing his fingers into them.

"I think we need to just admit it, Hermione," he sighed and slipped his glasses back on before looking over at her. "Hogwarts doesn't have any information on horcruxes. If Voldemort couldn't find it all those years ago, I don't think we will be able to do much better."

"But we have to." Hermione answered, flipping another page and running her finger over a diagram there before she realized it was a carving of a flayed human being. Recoiling she slammed the book shut. "I just mean that we have to be better than him. If we're going to beat him."

She glanced over at her best friend and found his green eyes troubled. "Hermione, when it comes to it—"

"It's late." Hermione cut him off. She knew what he was going to say and didn't want to get into it right now. War was coming, whether they wanted it to or not and when it came to it... well, they both knew what that meant, deep down. "Let's put these back and call it a day."

"All right, Hermione," Harry sighed and started stacking up the large books before he carried them away.

They walked back slowly to the Gryffindor common room and Hermione barely noticed when Harry mumbled the password to the Fat Lady and the portrait hole swung open. They said their goodnights and Harry gave her a hug around the shoulders, thanking her for all her hard work. Hermione pushed open the door to her dormitory and fell onto her bed, fully clothed, and was asleep in seconds.

Malfoy thrust his fist into the air triumphantly. He'd done it. He'd been able to send an object, just an apple, but still, through the cabinet and have it returned. Thank fuck because he was about to lose his mind trying to get this blasted cabinet to work again and finally, *finally*, something good.

It only took, oh, almost six months or so, but when that apple showed up with a single bite out of it he felt something inside of him break free. He pulled a bottle of fire whisky out of his bag and pulled the cork out with his teeth before bringing it to his lips and tipping it back.

It burned on its way down but Draco drank deeply, swallowing mouthful after mouthful until he felt the pleasant buzz hit his head and smacked his lips together.

It was searing his throat and he pulled his lips back, wincing slightly at the sensation. His vision blurred for a moment and he felt his mouth pulling in a grin. It was working. Objects

could pass through it. All his work had not been in vain. He was going to restore his family's honor. He was going to show the Dark Lord that the Malfoy name still meant something.

He was going to save his parents.

Draco sank down in a dusty old armchair, not even caring that he was dirtying his robes. Fuck, nothing mattered right now except for the fact that he, Draco Malfoy, had repaired the fucking Vanishing Cabinet and soon, it would be working well enough to—

Draco's face fell.

He knew what repairing this cabinet would ultimately mean. Could he do it? He looked down at his wand in his hand. Could he point this at someone and say the words? He had no problem beating the shit out of someone or hurting them, but killing them, ending them... That was something different.

He turned the bottle up again and let the warm whisky chase away the dark thoughts. He deserved this. Deserved to celebrate and not worry for one evening about his task, his orders. He did his best not to think about them and knew that his drinking, his rashness all stemmed from it.

After all, it wasn't exactly like he had a choice.

Draco stood up and took a second to balance himself on unsteady legs. Tonight he was going to get black out drunk and not think about anything but the fact that he had finally made progress with the cabinet. He had spent every free second of the last week and a half in here working on it much to Crabbe and Goyle's chagrin. But since Granger had run off and was now bouncing between Saint Potter and that loser Longbottom, he had to do something to occupy his mind from chasing her around in it night after night.

He was making his way through the skinny paths when he stumbled and caught himself on a table stacked high with odds and ends all covered with dust and cobwebs.

Draco glared around him. He fucking hated this room.

Granger. He fucking hated her too. She couldn't just... just leave him like that. She couldn't just act like all of that was nothing. She... She... She was... his. She was a task too and one he hadn't made as much progress with as he'd like. He wanted her. Wanted her to want him. Wanted her to give herself to him, her whole self because...

Draco took another swig as he saw the door appear a few yards ahead of him.

Because he wasn't done with her. Because he broke McLaggen's hand for her. Because he was breaking every rule and tradition he had ever known to have her. Because—

Draco coughed and his hand slipped on the handle.

The fantasies of bending her over a table in the Library and fucking her until she screamed were just that, fantasies. But being inside her, feeling her legs around him, her mouth saying his name... It was like nothing else he'd ever felt.

And she fucking felt it too. He knew she did. He knew it.

Draco spilled out into the hallway, crashing into Goyle's little girl body.

“Watch it!” Goyle growled and pushed Draco from him.

Draco pushed himself against the wall to stay upright.

“Have a drink, Goyle,” Draco smiled and held out the bottle. Goyle eyed him, but took the bottle and drank. ‘You’ve earned yourself a few days off,’ Draco’s words were slurred. “I’ve got... got other things to do.”

The amber liquid sloshed in the bottle. “I thought you said this was the most important thing. There’s something else?” The little girl’s eyes doubled and swam in Draco’s vision.

The smile dropped from his face as Draco grabbed the bottle back from Goyle. Once again he failed to comprehend even the simplest aspect.

“Yeah, there’s someone else.” Draco snapped.

“Huh?” Goyle’s brow darkened over his eyes.

“Shut up you useless piece of shit.” Draco rolled his eyes and pushed the little girl Goyle in the direction of the stairs. Goyle bristled but Draco ignored it and shoved the bottle at him again. “Have another drink. Let’s go celebrate.”

Hermione climbed into her cold bed and ducked down under the covers. She pulled *Magical Hieroglyphs and Logograms* from under her pillow and propped it up on her chest. She had to admit she was relieved to be reading something other than a book on the dark arts and her eyes quickly began to dart across the page as her mind relaxed into the familiar subject.

She had gotten three chapters in when Lavender and Parvati finally made it up. She was used to ignoring them as they chatted while they brushed out their hair and rubbed lotion over their arms and legs. Honestly, they spent half their lives grooming themselves. Not that they needed it, they both were naturally pretty; Lavender with her clear skin and bright smile and Parvati with her dark hair and straight nose.

Not like her with her bushy hair and picked down nails.

Hermione blinked and tried to focus on the passage on the difference between the Elder Futhark and Older Futhark runes.

“I thought you two were fighting again,” Parvati said, sounding confused.

“We made up.” Lavender replied happily, patting her comforter with her hands. “He even said the L word this time.”

Parvati gasped and Hermione was glad for it because it covered the sound of her own sharp intake of breath.

“He actually said he loves you?” she asked in a hushed voice.

Hermione heard Lavender giggle and pulled her book down just far enough that she could see over the top of it. Lavender was sitting on the side of her bed with her fingers trying but failing to cover a large smile on her face.

“He apologized, like he always does,” she smiled again, “And he was so nervous when he said it, his whole face went red and he just kind of mumbled it at first and I was like ‘What’s that?’ like I didn’t understand him but really I just wanted him to say it again and Parv, oh my gosh, it was so sweet.”

Hermione didn’t hear the rest. In fact, she might have gone deaf for a moment as her mind spun to process this information. Ron and Lavender... in love. She had always thought there would come a day when Ron and Lavender ended things and then, if it wasn’t too late, they would have a chance to repair their friendship. But if Ron was in love with Lavender then... then that was it. She didn’t know how they could come back from this.

“—his house over the summer—”

“He’s asked you to come visit him?” Parvati asked, her dark eyes wide.

“Well, not yet, but I know he will,” Lavender said with a smug smile. “I mean, he can’t go two days without pawing at me like some kind of animal. There’s no way he can go a whole summer without me.”

Hermione felt sick. She hadn’t even thought of this summer. Normally Ron would write to her a week after she got home, begging her to come and stay. It normally took another week or so to convince her parents, claiming that it was easier to study with a friend who could quiz her, and eventually they would hug her tightly and tell her to write before sending her off to the Burrow. She loved spending time there with Mrs. Weasley and Ginny. But now, it would be Lavender he invited instead.

They talked for a few more minutes, but Hermione’s thoughts were louder than their whispers and eventually Parvati blew out the candle in between them and they crawled into their beds. Hermione softly closed her book and slipped it under her pillow before blowing out her own candle.

She layed on her side, eyes wide open, and listened as Lavender’s wistful sighs turned into deep breaths, but found no rest herself.

Draco had been so hung over the next day he had missed all of his classes. Snape stopped him in the Great Hall the following morning and told him to report to detention that evening. Draco glared at him, but held his tongue. One night of detention was bad enough and Snape seemed more than willing to dole out punishments to him these days. Git.

His Godfather did ask him if was feeling alright and Draco snarled as the older man looked over him appraisingly. He knew he looked like shit. Paler than usual with red, sunken eyes, but Draco just glared at him until his Head of House gave an annoyed sigh and ordered him to at least eat something before heading to detention.

He was to clean out Filch’s supply closets and organize them; without magic. Servant work. Draco’s lip curled as he pulled open the door to the third closet of the evening and stepped inside. It smelled like a mix of old cat food and something terribly sour that he, shuddering, hoped was a bowl of milk left for Mrs. Norris.

He started pulling the buckets off the shelves when the door behind him opened.

"I'm working on it, okay?" Draco snapped. It was probably Snape checking up on him. Nosey bugger. "If you've come to gloat then—"

He stopped talking as he turned and saw Granger standing there in the doorway. Damn, she was pretty. More than pretty she was... No, she was a Mudblood, *that's* what she was. Granger took a step closer to him and the door shut behind her with a click.

"Why did you get detention?" she asked.

Draco couldn't pull himself out of her big doe eyes and couldn't even summon a sneer in his current state of shock.

"Malfoy?" she asked and he realized that he had been staring.

"I was a bad boy," he smirked and threw the rag he was holding down on the shelf next to him.

"Aren't you always?" she asked and he was thrown off by the little tug at the corner of her mouth. Granger was... *flirting* with him.

"Been pretty good of late, actually." He leaned back against the shelves and crossed his arms. "Following... *your* rules, at least."

The corners pulled up a little higher and he felt his own lift with them. He liked this side of her. He liked that she was smiling. It made her cinnamon colored eyes sparkle.

"Have you?" she said and trailed her fingers along the edge of the shelf next to her. "Too bad, because I feel like breaking a new one of mine."

Fuck fuck fuck. His heart gave a large thump and pumped the blood right into his cock.

What the fuck was happening? Granger had hardly looked at him in two weeks. She had made sure that she stayed away from the lower levels of the castle and the seventh floor landing. He knew because he'd been looking for her. And the Library? Well she was never there without Saint Potter protecting her from the big bad Slytherin...

"Yeah?" was all he could manage. Shit, that was stupid. Where was his head at? Gone. It had gone the moment that Granger walked in.

"It's wrong," she said, her little bottom lip pouting out and, fuck another thump followed by a throb. "And we shouldn't..." She shook her head and those twisting curls bounced a little. Oh, he could make them bounce. *Hard*.

"Everything is wrong to someone," Draco said, finally finding something in his brain other than the memory of Granger's face as she came. 'Who's to say what's right or wrong?' She looked up at him and blinked those big brown eyes at him. "So you just do what feels good and try and make it to the next day."

"Is that how you live?" she breathed out. "Is that what it's like in your world?"

Draco's lips curved into a playful smirk. "Want to find out?"

"Yes."

He was hard. It happened so fast, it *hurt* and Draco growled against the twinge of pain in his groin.

He was exhausted but he wasn't about to let that stop him from having Granger again. Draco reached for her, but she pulled back quickly. His brow fell over his eyes in confusion for a moment. Was she teasing him?

Then Granger bit her lip and glanced down and then back up to him before she knelt before him.

"Oh fucking hell."

Her lip escaped her teeth as she smiled sweetly at him and giggled a little. How could she still look so innocent, so... pure?

"You'll need to tell me... how," she said in a soft voice.

His cock strained in his trousers, trying to get to her. *Easy, boy.*

He cupped her face and ran his thumb over her smooth cheek, slightly flushed with just a hint of red. Cherry red. Gryffindor red.

He ran his fingers into her curls and felt his chest rise and fall heavily.

"Take him out." Sweet Salazar he loved how she obeyed. Her hands raised up to the button on his trousers and pulled it open all while she kept her eyes on his. Such big, sweet eyes...

She was always a good student and had remembered his lesson in the Leaky Cauldron well as she ran her hand up and down his shaft.

"Open your mouth." His voice was hoarse and rough, his rain grey eyes locked onto her.

Granger's pink lips parted and she glanced down at his cock in front of her.

"Start with your tongue," Draco's heart was racing in his chest. Normally he could focus and control its beating and his breathing along with it, but right now he was too entranced by Granger's soft tongue slipping past her lips to do anything but tighten his hold in her messy curls and she let out a small gasp before she flicked her tongue against his tip.

"Again."

Another small swipe.

"More."

She licked his head with the length of her tongue.

"Put it in your mouth."

It was euphoric. Her lips were so soft as they closed around him and she gently pulled them back over his head and then repeated the action without being told to.

"Take your tits out."

He needed a second. His blood was rushing through him and he swallowed, trying to regain a bit of his composure as she unbuttoned her shirt and reached behind her to undo her bra.

Why did he think having her tits out was going to help him calm down? Draco reached down and ran his hand over them, pushing it into her and feeling her nipple harden under his hand. Granger closed her eyes and let out a low breath. She was filthy; getting turned on by blowing him in a supply closet. Where had this girl been? Hiding away under frumpy sweaters and behind books... He'd never imagined Good Girl Granger was this... wild. Was there anything wrong with her?

Mudblood.

Draco pinched her nipple and released it quickly as her eyes shot back open and locked onto his. She was a Mudblood. Dirty. Nasty. Inferior. He had to remember that.

"You like this? On your knees... My cock in your face?" Draco grabbed her chin as she turned her head down, forcing her to look back up at him. "Suck, whore."

He applied just enough pressure to her cheeks to open her mouth again and shoved his dick in. Her eyes flashed with something for just a moment, but then she tightened her lips around him and took him into her mouth. He leaned back against the shelves behind him, letting her work herself on him because she was doing a hell of a job just on her own.

Why had he waited so long to do this? Why hadn't he gone after her the night of the Yule Ball when she came walking in looking like... Well like nothing he had ever seen before. Pretty little dress hugging her newly formed curves, hair pulled to the side so he could stare at her long neck, pink little lips pulled back and smiling... Draco breathed out a groan. Those same lips were sucking his cock right now.

He tightened his hold on her hair and pushed his hips forward, sliding more of him in her mouth.

Granger stilled for a moment before resuming her movements, incorporating the few extra inches he had given her.

"Oh hell yes," Draco groaned and she looked up at him with those melted chocolate eyes and he thought he might just melt into her mouth right then.

He pulled her head back and she gasped as his cock popped out of her mouth.

"Lick it some."

Her tongue was at him again, bolder now as it ran up and down his length, her lips brushing lightly against him. She leaned forward eagerly and her tits jumped a little at the movement and ran her tongue down and back up his entire shaft then she sat back, mouth open and waited for him.

Holy shit.

Holy fucking shit.

She was perfect.

Draco pushed his cock back in her mouth and pulled her head down on him until he felt the back of her throat. Granger made a small noise and he held her there.

“Take a breath through your nose. Relax your throat. If you’re going to puke, grab my ankle.”

Granger’s eyes widened and she gave him the smallest nod before he slid down her throat.

Her mouth was silky smooth and wonderfully warm around him and her throat squeezed him just a little tighter. He thrust against her a few times and realized he was almost grunting with every breath. Fuck, it was just too good. She was too good. Taking his cock like a pro while staring up at him with those big doe eyes.

Faster. He couldn’t stop now. He was close, so close. His dick tightened and he felt her hand land on his knee. Silently he begged her to keep it there just a little while longer until he was done and not drop it to his ankle. The brim of her eyes had a line of water at them and she made a small noise, throat vibrating around him.

Please, please Granger... Just a little more... Please...

“Fucking take it,” he growled. “Swallow me.”

Her hand gripped his ankle tightly.

He could have roared like a dragon in that moment. No! He was so close, so fucking close!

Draco’s chest tightened in frustration and she pulled against his hand holding her in place.

“Shit!”

Draco pulled his dick from her mouth and Granger gasped loudly and gulped down air. He was still holding onto her head and forced it backwards roughly as he gripped himself with his other hand. In a few strokes he was spilling everything he had onto her chest, staring into her rich brown eyes and seeing the desire flickering deep in them. She was filthy. But only for him.

“Bloody hell, Granger,” Draco panted and finally let go of her hair, gripping one of the supports of the shelves and he watched the last drops fall from him onto her chest. “I’ve never come from a blowjob like that.” He tucked himself back in his trousers and looked back down at her.

“*Evanesco*,” she muttered and waved her wand over herself before shyly smiling up at him. “Thanks.”

She was thanking him?! If she wasn’t a Mudblood, he’d marry her.

Wait, no.

No.

Not Granger.

It was just post-orgasmic bliss that made him think that.

No.

Uh-uh.

Never Granger.

And she was a Mudblood.

She was on her feet and trying to fix her bra back when he grabbed her around the waist and pulled her up against him. Even if she was a Mudblood she had done a phenomenal job and therefore she deserved a reward.

Even his hounds got treats.

Draco spun her around and picked her up, pushing the dirty contents of the shelf onto the floor and sat her on it.

Her hands were on his shoulders and holding to him tightly. He liked it. A lot. He wished he could take off his shirt and feel her hands on his skin, but then she'd see the mark and if kicking Cormac's ass made her run off for two weeks he could only imagine what she would do if she saw the Dark Mark on his arm.

No, he'd have to settle for his hands on her instead.

Draco grabbed her tits and pushed them together, diving down on them with his lips, tongue, and teeth.

A strangled moan escaped her as Draco swirled his tongue around one of her pink little nipples before he caught it in his teeth, pulling on it until she let out another moan, this one louder and followed by a quick intake of breath. Draco groaned as he sucked on it, letting his mouth dispel the bit of pain he caused her.

After care was important.

If you cared about the girl.

Draco growled and her hand ran up his neck and into his hair.

All he cared about was keeping Granger coming back for more.

He kissed his way over to her other tit and bit it.

Hard.

"Malfoy!"

Kiss.

Soft.

She sighed.

He squeezed them together tightly, burying his face in them for a moment before he reached between her legs and...

"Fuck, Granger, no knickers?" Draco grinned widely.

She blushed. How the fuck was she blushing right now when she's the one who showed up with nothing under her skirt? Still so innocent. Only filthy for him.

"You're learning."

She giggled.

Her mouth was as almost as good as her cunt and his dick was jealous of his fingers as he slid them into her.

“Sucking my dick got you wet, kitten?” he whispered in her ear.

“Yes.”

What a wonderful word.

“And I bet this little pussy was just quivering for me,” he breathed in her sweet vanilla cinnamon scent and ran his nose along the edge of her ear.

“Yes,” she breathed out and he felt the warmth of it in his hair.

“Did it miss me? Miss my fingers, my cock?”

Her voice raised an octave. “Yes...”

He bit down on her ear lobe softly. No pain this time and he felt her tighten around his fingers.

“Which more?”

“What?” she gasped and he pulled back far enough to look at her.

In, out, in, out. Her face was pulling in want.

“My fingers or my cock? Which did you miss more?”

She stifled a moan.

Draco stopped moving.

“Which?” he asked in a deep voice and saw a flicker of frustration in her eyes.

“Your... cock,” she finally said, blushing that cherry red again.

“Slut.”

She stared at him. Then smiled.

He grinned back. And shoved his fingers back inside her.

She cried out, clinging onto his shoulder and neck, her nails digging into the exposed skin on the back of his neck.

“I’m...” she gasped out. “I’m going to...”

“Ask.”

Her eyes flew open.

“Ask me before you come.”

Another flicker of frustration and she pursed her lip together tightly.

He rolled her nipple in between his fingers and leaned down, capturing the other with his lips. She breathed out. He slowed his fingers inside of her to a streeeler’s pace.

“No...” she moaned and pressed her hips forward a little.

Draco grazed his teeth over her nipple. “Ask me.”

Granger threw her head back, swallowing down another moan as he played with her tits and slowly slid his fingers back in.

He bit the nipple softly, sucking on it before leaning to whisper in her ear, “*Beg me.*”

She looked like she was near tears. He had never seen anything more beautiful.

He swiped his thumb over her swollen clit and she cried out, body shaking against him,

“Please! Oh, Draco, please!”

On Salazar’s watery grave he had never heard anything better than that.

“Please what?” he teased, slamming his fingers in her and barely grazing her clit.

“Please make me come,” she begged. “Make me come, Draco.”

He growled from deep within and pumped his fingers into her, swirling his thumb over her clit again and again while he moved his hand up from her chest to wrap around the back of her neck, pulling her lips on his and she moaned loudly into it, body bucking as she rode out her orgasm.

Draco kept at it, until she started whimpering, falling against him and he slowed, letting her body twitch a few times with the last bit of her reward before pulling his fingers from her.

Finally he let her lips go.

Granger gasped for breath, cheeks and tits flushed, and looked up at him through half closed lids.

God, she was...

Where there words?

No.

Only...

Well... not *feelings*.

Granger sighed and slipped her hands down to his chest.

“Thank you.”

Oh fuck. Maybe there were.

11. eleven

Chapter 11

Draco was lying back on the black leather couch and staring up at the domed vaulted ceiling of the Slytherin common room. Large stone beams arched up, holding up the walls of the underwater room and keeping the cold, dark water of the Black Lake from crushing it and rushing in.

He thought he saw a crack.

These weren't feelings, they were... Fuck, what were *these*?

It was normal to feel *something*, for someone who was so per—

No. Stop.

Try again.

It was *normal* to feel something for someone who was exactly what he wanted.

Draco pressed his lips together. Not that much better.

It was normal to feel something.

He'd start there.

Just because it had never happened before didn't mean that it couldn't happen, that he wasn't capable of caring about someone.

But not Granger.

Never Granger.

It was normal that eventually one of the girls he fucked would spark something—

No! No sparks! He scowled.

Not sparks, more like a roaring fire. A mix of flickering yellow, glowing orange, and burning red. Gryffindor red.

He glanced back up at the crack.

It was normal... to feel. On fire.

He wanted that crack to break and all that freezing water to come crashing down on him.

It didn't mean anything; *she* didn't mean anything.

It was just a good fuck. That's all. That's why he was feeling like this because he had never imagined that it would have been this good. He had played it out dozens of times in his

head. Hundreds. Maybe that was why this was happening. He had to let all this play out, over and over, until his brain caught up with his cock and he'd had enough of her.

Maybe that could work? At least this way he'd still get to fuck Granger as much as he wanted. And once he had his fill, whenever that was, *then* it would be normal. Then he could go back to hating her in peace. He could finish his task. He could kill Dumbledore—

He swallowed something sour tasting. That's what started all of this in the first place. He only had a limited time left and had thought what the hell, why not try and get under the Mudblood's skirt? Not like anything really mattered anymore.

It didn't matter. None of it mattered. Nothing he was feeling or not feeling. If fucking Granger made his day just a little easier then he was going to do it. Because he hated everything else. Everything but her.

No, *especially* her.

Draco stared at the crack until his eyes burned.

This was not normal.

"Stay away from him."

Hermione blinked and looked into the pinched face of Lavender Brown up from her perch on the courtyard bench. It was the first day it hadn't rained in a week and she had eaten lunch quickly and taken the rest of her break out in fresh air. It was cold and bracing, but at least it was quiet here and things were busy enough inside her head sometimes she had to retreat away from her classmates to find some peace.

"I'm sorry, who are we talking about?" Hermione asked, nonplussed. There was no way Lavender knew about Malfoy. Right?

"Ron."

"Oh." Hermione shrugged and bent her head back down to her book. "Okay." Although she didn't feel the same anger towards Ron as she had before, they were still not on speaking terms and Hermione had no plans to change that until he apologized. Profusely.

Lavender remained standing there until Hermione looked back up at her again.

"Can I help you?" she asked, a little irritated now.

"I don't know what little game you're playing but just so you know, Ron is mine." Lavender put her hands on her hips.

Hermione stared up at her completely lost. It was not a feeling she was accustomed to. "Okay..." she said slowly.

"So keep your mitts off."

"Done." Hermione said simply. Yes, she missed Ron and the friendship they had shared and yes, it was causing a strain on her friendship with Harry now too, but no she was not trying to steal Ronald away from Lavender. Her feelings towards him were not completely

resolved, but she was working on it. It just took time. And now that Ron was in love with Lavender she needed to take that time for herself. And maybe share a little bit of it with Malfoy.

“And keep his name out of your mouth,” Lavender added snottily.

She’d had enough of this.

“Okay—” she closed her book and stood up. “I don’t know what you’re talking about and I don’t—”

“You were calling his name in your sleep last night.” Lavender’s eyes raked over her. “Desperate, really.”

Hermione froze as a chill wind whipped past them, throwing her curls back over her shoulders. She had dreamed of the Department of Mysteries again last night, a common nightmare ever since the events occurred last year. “When I was asleep? As in unconscious? As in not in control of myself?”

“Stay away from Ron.” Lavender poked her finger into Hermione’s chest.

“Why don’t you tell him to stay away from me?!” she snapped back. “The only time we’ve spoken in the last few months was because he talked to me!”

Lavender’s face fell open in shock. “How *dare* you—”

“You know what? Why don’t *you* stay away from *me*, Lavender?” Hermione snarled. “And don’t touch me again.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Lavender sneered in her face.

Hermione felt the growing fire in her flare up. It had been a spark, weeks ago, and had flickered into a low flame inside of her. Her escapades with Malfoy had freed something, changed something in her. She wasn’t the same bookish girl she had been.

“Want to find out?” she said softly, glaring back at the blonde in front of her.

Lavender took a step back and looked over Hermione once more.

“What’s gotten into you?” she asked.

Something in her roared out the answer before she had time to think it through.

“Something bigger and better than what’s gotten into *you*.”

Lavender gave a disbelieving scoff and staring at Hermione, slowly took a few more steps back before quickly turning and heading back inside.

Her heart was pounding in her chest, hands shaking from the adrenaline pumping through her. She had never done anything like that before. She would never have dreamed of doing something like that before. Did she really just imply that she had slept with someone, Godric, *bigger and better* than Ron? What was that?!

It had felt... good. Standing up to Lavender after years of little passive aggressive comments and then rubbing her relationship with Ron in her face and finally Hermione had been able to see a little flicker of apprehension in those pale blue eyes. She wasn’t the

bookish, odd little girl she had been before. Something in her was changing, growing, and she liked it.

She liked what Malfoy was doing to her. She always had a bold streak in her. She hadn't flinched when she had to fight with Harry at the Ministry and she hadn't cared at all about breaking the rules to form the D.A., but this felt different. This was coming from whatever it was that she was getting from Malfoy. In the oddest way it was almost empowering. She was seeing what she could be and... she liked it.

"Well then why don't you, I don't know, tell her?" Harry said as he and Ron walked past Hermione at her desk in the back of the class before Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry glanced down at her and gave her a small smile. Ron caught her eye for a moment and then looked away.

"I don't know how much longer I can keep on like this though," Ron grumbled. "She's... suffocating me."

Their conversation faded away from her as they took their seats out of earshot. Hermione wondered if Ron's comment had anything to do with the fact that Lavender might as well have put a permanent sticking charm on her and Ron. Anytime that Hermione was even in the same room as them, Lavender practically climbed on top of him.

Parvati and Lavender entered the room a few minutes after. Lavender ignored her, but Parvati's dark eyes landed on her before she leaned over and whispered something behind her hand to Lavender as they hurried past Hermione to their seats.

She pulled out her textbook and opened her notebook. She straightened her quill and laid her wand on her desk. No one was going to interfere with her education and schoolwork, no matter how annoying they were. She straightened her quill next to her wand and carefully unscrewed the cap of her inkwell and set it down as well, opening her notebook to look over the notes from last lesson.

Malfoy pulled his chair out, scratching the legs loudly on the floor before throwing himself in it. He threw his bag on the desk and stretched his legs out, leaning on the back two legs of the chair indolently. His clothes were finely pressed with crisp lines in them today. No wrinkles or messy hair, instead Malfoy looked every bit a part of the aristocracy he was born into.

She glanced over and saw Parvati watching her again. Quickly she looked away from Hermione but right before she went back to readying herself for the lesson, she saw Parvati's keen eyes look in Malfoy's direction as well.

Hermione felt her heart give an extra thump and looked down and turned the page of her notebook to a blank one. Snape cleared his throat at the front of the class and everyone quieted down. No introduction, he started lecturing before half of the class even had their quills out. Vampires today. Hermione bent her head down, messy curls pooling on the desk as she started taking notes, writing down everything she could about vampires even though she had read the chapter on them twice now and probably could have taught it herself.

It had not been ten minutes before Anthony Goldstein raised his hand and asked Snape to repeat what he had just said on anti-coagulants in vampire venom. Snape's disgusted expression silenced him and Hermione made a mental note to find him after class and let him copy her notes on it.

Malfoy snorted. It wasn't loud, but from her adjacent desk in the back of the class Hermione could clearly hear it. Apparently Snape had as well.

"Something amusing, Mr. Malfoy?" he drawled. Malfoy merely shrugged. "You might try opening your book or are you incapable of that as well as your failure to maintain your position as the Slytherin Seeker?"

Hermione quickly looked at Malfoy who was seething in his seat. The little color his face contained seemed to pale as he ground his teeth together. He had gone impossibly still. His chest wasn't even moving; it was as if he was made of marble. She turned when she heard sniggering and saw Ron trying to hold it in. She felt something burn inside of her and she wanted to throw her inkwell at him and see if he would still be smiling after that.

Malfoy pushed himself up from the desk and stood there, tall and towering for a moment.

"Sit... down." Snape's curt voice cut across the classroom.

Hermione looked back towards Malfoy, not a hair out of place and not a muscle twitching in response. He moved as quickly as a snake striking when he grabbed his bag off the desk and turned, taking long strides to the door in the back of the classroom.

"Return to your seat!" Snape hissed. Malfoy did not turn. "Mr. Malfoy!"

The door slammed behind him and he was gone.

He hadn't been at dinner. He hadn't been wandering the lower levels of the castle either because she had taken extra time in her patrol this evening to check twice. Okay, three times, but who was counting? Prefects tended to cut their patrols short down there, at least the ones who weren't in Slytherin. Hermione had never spent any more time than necessary in the dungeons and Ron always rushed through it claiming that part of the castle just creeped him out. Normally she patrolled with Ron, but not anymore so tonight she had taken her time but had not found what she was looking for. What was she looking for?

Hermione took a deep breath and pushed the Library doors open. It was the last place that she could think to look for him and had resigned herself to the fact that if he wasn't here then he didn't want to be found. Her steps were light as she quickly walked past the aisles, glancing down then and pointing her lit wand into the darkness. She hesitated a moment when she reached the gate to the Restricted Section but steeled herself and opened it.

The darkness was thicker here and she held her wand a little higher trying to combat it. She made her way down the aisles, twisting and turning until she came to a stop. The next one was where Malfoy had held her hands above her head and pressed her against the shelves. The memory still brought a heated flush to her and Hermione lifted her chin a little high as she rounded the corner.

Malfoy was sitting on the floor. His long legs stretched out in front of him in a V and a bottle of fire whisky sat between them. He had pulled his tie loose and it hung like a long green snake around his neck while his perfectly coiffed hair was now tousled and looked as though he might have tried to pull it out at one point or another. He swung his head in her direction. The grey of his eyes all but a silver surrounding large, black pupils that expanded slowly as she came nearer.

“Granger...” He smirked slowly. “I knew you’d find me.”

“Why’s that?” she asked.

“Because... you always do.” He leaned his head back against the books behind him and lifted the bottle to his lips. “Always there.”

Now that she had found him, Hermione wasn’t sure she wanted to be here. His wand lay at his side, inches from his hand which was resting on his thigh and he coughed a little as he sat the bottle back down. Malfoy was hard enough to deal with and she had no idea if a drunk Malfoy would be better or worse.

“Come on, pet,” Malfoy held the bottle out to her. “It would be dangerous to let me drink alone.”

Hermione bit her lip. Dangerous. Was he inebriated enough to know what words he was choosing?

She walked stiffly over and knelt down beside him. Blue candles hovered overhead and she flicked her wand, extinguishing the light at the tip of it. “What does it taste like?” she asked hesitantly. Malfoy raised an eyebrow and shook his head, laughing a little. “What? Why are you laughing at me?”

He handed her the bottle and Hermione sniffed it gingerly. “Do you have any idea just how... sweet you are? No matter Potter and Weasley kept you all to themselves all these years.”

Hermione tasted a bit of the whisky with the tip of her tongue and quickly pulled the bottle away from her lips. She placed the back of her hand over her mouth for a moment before sticking out her tongue and making a disgusted noise.

Malfoy laughed again and took the bottle back from her. His fingers closed over hers and Hermione looked up at him again. Normally his expression was so reserved and guarded that it was almost overwhelming to see him like this. His muscles were relaxed, both in his shoulders and face. His smiles were slow, but seemed to come easier. And his eyes... normally cold and hard now were.... swirling with currents of... something, she wasn’t sure what.

“They didn’t... keep me. And how can you stand to drink that? It’s awful!” She shook her head and her caramel curls tossed back and forth.

Malfoy took a deep breath. “There are worse things.” He shrugged and took another drink.

“Why are you here, Malfoy?” Hermione asked and sunk down from her knees and tucked her legs to the side. Malfoy watched her move and she quickly adjusted her skirt when she

saw his gaze falling on the stretch of skin that had just become exposed over her knee. “Why are you drinking alone?”

He answered without hesitation. “It’s safer.”

He was staring straight ahead at the shelves on the opposite side of the narrow aisle. She was surprised that he even answered her question seeing as how much her inquiries had bothered him in the past.

“Safer?” She pushed her luck.

“Apparently I talk when I drink now,” he swung his head back to her, glaring. ‘Thanks to you. And there are things that I would—’ “He stopped talking and blinked his eyes before opening them wide.” Woah, okay.’ He ran his hand over his face and blinked a few more times, trying to gather himself back together. “Things that I would prefer not to be known. Drink.” He finished and shoved the bottle back at her. His words came slowly and weren’t as crisp and curt as they normally were.

Hermione pushed it back towards him. “No thanks.”

“Drink.” His voice dropped low and she had the distinct impression that it wasn’t an offer, but an order.

Hermione gently took the bottle. “What sort of things?” she asked, holding the bottle up almost to her lips. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to sit here and drink with Malfoy, but she knew for certain that she didn’t want to leave just yet.

Malfoy smirked. “Maybe the fact that I’m fucking a Mudblood.”

“Don’t call me that.” Hermione said firmly, setting the bottle down hard. She was not about to sit here and drink with someone who was going to throw cruel slurs around like that.

“What would you like me to call you then?” Malfoy asked, eyes playful. ‘Pet? Kitten?’ He leaned a little closer to her and she could smell the whisky on his breath mixing with his mint. “My dirty little slut?”

She glared at him as he leaned back again, taking the bottle with him. “I have a name, you know.”

“Oh,” Malfoy said as if he was suddenly bored. “I hadn’t noticed.”

“There’s a lot you don’t notice about me,” Hermione muttered and looked down at the floor.

“Doubt it.” He snorted. Then added, “Like what?”

She glanced back up at him, a thin silver band was the only thing holding back the impossible blackness in his eyes. He was so confusing. Most of the time he acted like he hated her, but then he would grab her and kiss her with such need, such want, that she knew those kisses weren’t fueled by hatred. And what was most confusing were times like this when he just talked to her, talked to her like he... liked her.

“Like the fact that I’m not just a bookworm or your plaything. I’m a person.” She raised her chin up. She may not know Malfoy, but she knew herself.

“Mudbloods aren’t people.” Malfoy rolled his eyes.

“What makes you think that? Honestly. What things make you think that the rhetoric you were taught growing up is correct? In what way are Muggleborns really less than Purebloods?”

Malfoy stared at her for a moment before taking a deep breath. “You come into our world knowing nothing. Nothing about us. Nothing about magic. Nothing about the history of the culture that you’re now claiming to be a part of. You come from Muggles. Muggles who have forced us to hide away in secrecy for our own protection for centuries. You’re part of the problem.”

“And what problem is that?” Hermione snapped.

“The fact that we are supposed to just welcome you with open arms. My family has worked for centuries for the position that we hold. We’ve earned our place, we deserve it. If a Muggle child shows abilities then they are brought into our world, our society, and we are supposed to just, what, accept that? Treat you like you belong here? You don’t. You’ve got your own world. Go live in it and leave us alone,” he added almost bitterly and brought the bottle up, scoffed, and sat it back down.

She had never really heard the reasoning from someone like Malfoy before. Of course she had looked up Pureblood and Muggleborn history in the library first. Then she had talked about it with Harry and Ron and even Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, asking questions after her second year as to why Muggleborns were so hated by certain types of wizards. They explained all about blood Purity and she had thought she understood. Until now. Until she realized why they prized that Purity.

“And that’s how you see me? That I would be better off with a snapped wand and forced back into the Muggle world?” she asked bitterly.

Malfoy’s expression changed and he had that same tired look on his face for a moment before the mischievous smirk was back. “You’d be better stripped naked and spread wide.”

“I mean it, Malfoy.” Hermione wasn’t budging, but she did blush at his filthy words.

“So do I.” He pushed her skirt up her leg some and she shoved his hand away, pulling it back down.

“How do you reconcile it then?” she asked quickly and he looked back up at her. “Your ideology and the fact that you... that we...”

“Does it matter?” he asked, rolling his eyes and she noticed it took him a second too long to bring them back in focus. She glanced down at the bottle of fire whisky. It was more almost half gone.

“It matters to me,” she said softly.

“I’m a Malfoy. That means something in this world whether you realize it or not. Means I’m important. Means I’ll go on to do great things like my father and his father before him. Means I’ll carry on that legacy, that name. Means I’ll protect it. Fucking you is just...” his eyes moved over her and then, he sighed.

"I like certain things, Granger. I need them. Other girls... they can... they're fine, but there's a... a type that I have to have. And I guess being a Mudblood gives you a natural subservience that I can use. And right now I need it. I need..." He trailed off and slowly brought his eyes back to hers.

"A certain type," she stated and took the bottle from beside him and sniffed it again. Three Butterbeers had her struggling to stay upright; she only imagined what this fire whisky would do to her. "And what type is that exactly?"

Malfoy's eyes narrowed but there was no malice in them this time. He was studying her again. "Smart girl like you, surprised you haven't figured it out yet."

"Well as I've said before, I'm not as experienced as you," Hermione snipped and took another sniff of the bottle; there was something sweet there. Despite his cruel words about Muggleborns, Malfoy was actually being... civil, maybe even pleasant. At least, as pleasant as he got. She wasn't sure if he had meant to, or even noticed that he did, but he had given her a compliment. Again.

"You're so..." Malfoy took a deep breath and his lids hung heavily over his grey eyes. "Pure." He slurred the word slowly and she saw him reach his hand out, but wasn't sure if he was reaching for her or the bottle.

Hermione wrinkled her nose. "You don't make any sense." She fought back a laugh in the back of her throat. Drunk Malfoy wasn't so bad after all.

"Neither do you!" Malfoy said playfully. "A Mudblood who can't get her nose out of a book long enough to look into a mirror and you're still one of the best looking girls in school. So prim and proper but the second I get your knickers off you're just as filthy as me."

Was he right? Was she... like him? Was that why she let him do these things to her? Hermione felt the corners of her mouth turn up in a small smile. "You complimented me again."

"I guess you're right, I'm not making any sense." Malfoy let out a low laugh. It sounded almost real. He reached over for the bottle, but Hermione yanked it back from him. "That's mine."

Hermione gave him a flat smile and took a large drink. She was emboldened by his change in demeanor and if he was being civil then maybe she could enjoy a drink with him. The fire whisky burned down her throat deeply and as soon as she brought the bottle away from her mouth she could feel it in her head. This worked much faster than Butterbeer. It tasted *awful* though and for a moment she thought she might get sick until a strange warm feelings seeped into her bloodstream and she glanced up to find Malfoy's dark eyes wide.

"Oh, is it?" she said sweetly as she wiped her bottom lip with her thumb. "I didn't know."

"Mine." Malfoy growled and lunged for her, grabbing her wrists and pulling her towards him in one swift movement. His lips collided with hers and she tasted the same awful whisky on his tongue but found when it was mixed with his mint, it wasn't as bad as she thought it had been. She felt the bottle of fire whisky being lifted from her hands and heard as he set it on the hard floor beside them before he wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her onto his lap.

Hermione was kissing him back. She didn't even try to fight it this time, she didn't want to. She wanted to. She wanted this. Wanted him. Her hands were on his chest and she dug her fingers into the soft shirt there, feeling the hardness of his chest underneath. Malfoy's hands spread over her back, holding her up and against him as his lips enveloped hers, sucking and slipping with their whisky wetness.

She ran her hands up over his collar and neck and into his already tousled hair. Malfoy groaned a little as her nails ran along his scalp and Hermione repeated the action, causing him to press forward, deepening their kiss and turning it rougher. His teeth grazed across her bottom lips and her breath hitched as she waited for him to bite down on it.

Malfoy slowly ran his tongue across it, cool from the whisky and cold air. Hermione shivered in his hands. She felt one of his hands rise up into her hair and knew he was about to wrap it around his fist to control their kiss. When he sharply jerked her head to the side she gasped out against the twinge of pain and heard a dark chuckle come from the lips that had just been on hers.

"Oh my little Mudblood... the things you make me want to do..." His voice was low and hoarse and something in it made a warmth that was not unlike the feel of the fire whisky sink down deep inside of her.

"What?" she breathed out.

His dark eyes flitted to hers for a moment and she saw him studying her, as if he was trying to make sure he heard her correctly. Then the smirk came back and he pulled her close to him until his lips were against her ear. She felt his hand move over her hip and down her leg to the edge of her long skirt. She had always asked Madame Malkin to leave a few extra inches at the hem, but Malfoy's tortuously slow movement now made her wish that she had cast a shrinking charm on them like some girls did.

"Maybe I shouldn't tell you," he teased and slid his fingers under the hem of her skirt. They started their ascent up her thigh. 'You're such a good little girl, after all, maybe it would be too much for you.' They trailed over her inner thigh and she knew he could feel her trembling. "So soft, so sweet..." He dropped his lips to her neck and brushed them against the sensitive skin. "So warm." Hermione tensed in his grasp, waiting, anticipating his touch.

His fingers slid against her knickers and she gasped loudly making Malfoy chuckle again. "So wet for me." His lips latched onto her neck, sucking at the skin there and a small moan escaped her lips before she could stop it. He brushed his lips back over the shell of her ear. "My little Gryffindor kitten." He breathed out into it and rubbed his fingers against her.

Hermione felt another moan coming up and did her best to swallow it, but Malfoy had her head pulled back and to the side, exposing her neck and it slid out before she could stop it as his lips moved down the skin there, leaving scorching kisses and harsh nips. He parted her legs wider and then slid his hand into her knickers, not giving her any time to conjure the thought to close them back.

"Fuck, I love your pussy," he murmured into her skin as he explored her. Hermione was enraptured, unable to do anything but dig her nails into his shoulders tighter as he swirled his fingers over her, rubbing them back and forth. She lifted her hips a little, meeting his movements, her body begging for more, more, more.

“Eager little thing, aren’t you?” He smirked against the skin of her neck. She was on fire. Her body was alight with arousal and she wanted, no *needed*, Malfoy to touch her. To give her what he had before. She felt his hand move and then he slid a finger inside of her as she let out a low moan in response. He pumped it slowly, in and out of her a few times as she clung onto his shoulder, feeling the muscle move under the shirt.

He was not bulky, built like a Seeker, but he was still much larger than she was. He might have lost his position on the team, but he hadn’t lost the physique that the hours he had put into practice had given him. She wanted to feel it, wanted to explore his body with her hands. The dips and lines of his muscles and the way his skin stretched over them. She struggled with the top button on his shirt and popped it open, fingers quickly moving to the next when Malfoy abruptly pulled back and stared at her with granite grey eyes.

“What are you doing?” he asked and stilled his movement between her legs.

Hermione stopped and felt the heat of embarrassment replace the heat of desire. “I... I wanted to—” she swallowed. “Can I... touch you?” Why was she so embarrassed to ask this? After everything they had done already? Was that too intimate for them? Did Malfoy not want her to?

His dark eyes were troubled but slowly he nodded. “You can open it, but don’t take it off,” he said with a warning in his voice and loosened his hold on her hair ever so slightly. Hermione’s fingers gradually began to work on the second button and she felt him begin to move back into her. She got the next two done then ran her hands back up over the soft fabric and pushed it off the top of his shoulders.

She knew she was staring as she watched the muscles move and contract with his movements, but found herself unable to look away. Her fingertips moved over the surprisingly cool skin, pale under the dim blue lights surrounding them. Her hands spread across his chest and Malfoy took in a deep breath, filling his lungs and closed his eyes for a moment before opening them, locking onto hers, and speeding up his movement.

Hermione’s mouth was open and she wanted to taste him; his lips first and then his skin but Malfoy pulled his hand from her and grabbed her shirt, ripping the top few buttons off as he pulled it open with a growl and then dove down onto her flesh, sucking, licking, and biting at everything he could reach at the same time pushing her legs back open and pulling down her knickers to her knees before diving back in her with two fingers this time.

“Fucking hell, you’re even tight on my *fingers*,” he groaned as he brought his mouth back up to her neck and pulling her head back to the side and tightening his grip on her hair. “Fucking perfect, you are,” he murmured and Hermione wasn’t sure if that was something he had meant to say out loud or not.

His teeth were digging into her skin hard enough to hurt, hard enough to feel good. Right when she thought she was going to cry out he would replace them with his lips, sucking and kissing at the tender spots he created. His thumb glided across her and she shifted slightly on his lap to give him better access to the bud of nerves that she desperately wanted him to touch.

As she did she felt his hand on against her hip and let out a small whimpering cry, knowing that she caused it and wondering if he was planning on replacing his fingers with it. His hands

were wonderful, but the feeling of him filling her, the pleasurable pressure was calling to her.

“Malfoy...” she moaned softly as he bit down on the skin over her collarbone.

He grazed his teeth over it again before kissing it and sucking on it for a moment. “No, kitten,” he corrected in a deep tone. “I told you, *my* name.”

Hermione’s eyes opened for a moment and she looked up at one of the floating blue candles. Then he ran his thumb over her clit and she lost her breath. He did it again and her hips bucked up, trying to elongate the sensation. On the third time she moaned out, “Draco!” loud enough for it to echo down the narrow aisle.

“As much as I want you screaming for me, I don’t fancy Flich getting a view of what’s between your thighs,” he chuckled and Hermione gasped, bringing her legs together with his hand still buried inside them. He flicked his thumb over her again and she gripped onto his shoulder and chest tightly. “Because it’s all for me. You’re all for me.” He whispered into her ear, sending a shiver through her body.

He dipped his head back down into the crook of her neck and drug his lips over her shoulder, opening his mouth and letting his tongue dance across her skin. He bit down the soft skin of her shoulder and Hermione wrapped a hand around the back of his neck, running it up into his hair again. Malfoy groaned and latched on harder as Hermione clenched around his fingers. She was close.

He pushed his fingers into her faster, harder, deeper and bit down on her skin with the same force. Hermione had only one sip of the fire whisky but felt drunk off of Malfoy and what he was doing to her. She moved her hips back and forth with him and against his groin, resulting in a low growl from deep in his chest that was released onto the spot on her shoulder he had latched onto with his teeth, sinking them in harder, further.

“Draco,” she moaned. “Draco—”

The growl intensified as did his fingers and his teeth. It hurt. Pain shot through her shoulder as Draco— No, *Malfoy* swiped his tongue over the patch of skin he was holding in between his jaws. It hurt, but it felt good.

Were they alike?

She cried out as her orgasm bloomed up from in between her legs, taking over every inch of her body and silencing the questions brewing in her brain. Malfoy did not relent. He kept the same forceful pace and did not let go of the soft skin between her shoulder and neck. The pain mixed with the pleasure and Hermione found herself shaking, clinging onto Malfoy desperately as she came undone in his arms. After... well she didn’t know how long because time might have stopped for a moment there, Hermione came back down and felt the last few tremors pass through her as Malfoy, not Draco, Malfoy finally slowed his movements.

“I’m going to have to get you a gag, pet,” he laughed a little and leaned in to kiss her. Hermione pushed against his chest and blinked as his hand fell from her hair to caress her cheek softly. Was she seeing things? What was on his mouth? There was a dark smear around his lips and...

“Oh my God!” Hermione gasped and then felt the deep aching pain where her shoulder met her neck. “You bit me!”

“Well, yeah,” Malfoy said as if it was something obvious.

“No, I mean you—” Hermione reached up to the base of her neck and touched it gently before holding up her fingers. They were covered with the same dark smudge as Draco—Malfoy’s lips. Up close she could see it was— “Blood!”

“What? It’s not the first time I made you bleed.” Malfoy rolled his eyes and leaned into her again. Hermione shoved her hand back against his chest.

“What are you talking about?”

Malfoy stared at her with a curious expression on his face, eyes dark and playful. “Granger, I took your virginity. I was covered in your blood.”

Hermione was mortified. She hadn’t even thought about it that night. Malfoy had cleaned everything up so quickly after she hadn’t even seen anything.

“I don’t care, in fact, it was kind of hot,” he admitted with a small shrug.

None of this made sense. He hated her because she was Muggleborn and disgusted by her supposed ‘dirty blood’ but he had just called her virgin’s blood hot?

“Makes you mine.”

Hermione’s mouth fell open and she looked deeply into those large black pupils that had expanded in the darkness of the Restricted Section. Dark thoughts and emotions swam behind them, but the one that surfaced was possession.

She didn’t know what to say. Was he just drunk or did he actually think that? And what did *she* think of that?

“Now,” he flashed her a devilish grin. “I’m going to give you what you’ve been missing, my little Mudblood.” He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers. They were wet and warm and Hermione didn’t like the strange squirming she felt inside her, even if it did make her mouth twitch in an almost excited smile. She wanted to think about all of this, process it and that was impossible when Malfoy was looking at her like... like she’d always wanted to be looked at. Oh wow, maybe she *was* like him.

His tie had fallen over his shoulder when she pushed his shirt back and he pulled it slowly over him, making the dark green shimmer like the scales of a snake as he gathered it up and held it out.

“Trust me?” He cocked his head and lifted an eyebrow. Hermione was frozen in place. The hand that had been in between her legs slowly reached up and pulled on her wrists gathering them as the grin spread over Malfoy’s face. He was going to bind her, restrain her. Make her his.

“I could *never* trust you.”

He might have been drunk, but she knew by the fall of his face that he remembered the words she spoke to him before. His expression changed quickly, dismay and bitterness battling for all but a moment before the cruel gleam she knew so well shone clearly in his silver eyes.

“But you can spread your fucking legs for me anytime I even *look* in your direction,” he snapped, all the playfulness gone from him like someone snuffing out the flame of a candle. “Mudblood whore.”

Hermione shoved herself back from him. He was quick, but the fire whisky had slowed him just enough so that when he reached for her, his outstretched hand only landed on the white cotton knickers around her knees and Hermione quickly slid out of them, backing against the opposite side of the aisle and using the shelves there to push herself to her feet.

Malfoy glared up at her, malice and hostility clear on his face. It was hard to believe that this was the same person who had just held her in his arms while she shook with the pleasure he gave her. Why had she even come looking for him? Why had she expected to find? Why was she even doing *any* of this in the first place?

Malfoy was trying to get to his feet, her knickers clutched tightly in his white fist. Hermione took a few steps back from him, bringing her hand up to the wound he had left on the base of her neck.

“Get back over here,” he said in that low commanding voice. She shook her head silently. She was backing down the narrow aisle, praying that the growing lump in her throat and the hot prick of tears would hold off for just a few more moments. She didn’t want to cry. She wouldn’t let him make her cry. “You can’t leave me... like this,” he said roughly as he pulled himself up using the shelves just as she had, knocking a few books to the ground in his clumsy attempt.

Hermione turned and glanced over her shoulder as she heard him get to his feet, stumbling forward. She quickened her pace, making it to the end of the aisle. “Get your ass back over here!” He roared.

Hermione did not turn back.

12. twelve

Chapter 12

How *dare* that goddamn bitch run out on him like that? Who the *fuck* did she think she was? Saying fucking shit like “*I could **never** trust you.*” Like she was so much better than him. Who the hell was she?! She was a filthy little Mudblood, nothing more, and he was a goddamn Malfoy!

Draco paced up and down the small walkway in front of the Vanishing Cabinet. His steps were heavy and his chest rose and fell fast with every breath he sucked in through his nose. He didn’t know why he had come here tonight, but where else was he going to go? He couldn’t focus, couldn’t concentrate. Not on anything that wasn’t the flash in her big brown eyes as she declared her disdain for him.

He had her moaning out his name like a dirty whore and she had the audacity to fucking walk away from *him*? No, that’s not how this worked. She couldn’t just sit there and look so beautifully innocent, couldn’t dig her nails into his skin and tremble against him and then act like he soulless. He closed his eyes, wishing it would dispel the shock and pain he had seen in hers at his harsh words.

His own opened and shone like mercury in the darkened room. She had deserved it though, it was her fault he had even said those things.

Why did she balk when he tried to tie her hands up? She hadn’t had a problem with anything else he had done to her, not a lasting one at least. Did she think he was going to hurt her? Well, he had planned on fucking the shit out of her and make her scream and cry, but she would have liked it. Deep down, she would have loved it.

And he would have loved doing it to her. He loved watching her adorable little mouth open as sharp breaths passed through it. Loved watching the rise of color in her cheeks, loved watching the deep cinnamon of her eyes burn into his as he gave her what only he could. No one else had touched her. She was Pure. Purely his.

“Are you a Death Eater?”

Those words had come back to haunt him as well. Draco rubbed his left forearm, trying to ease the dull burn there but it did nothing. He wished he had another bottle of Ogden’s, but Nott hadn’t been able to get any more in lately and his own stores were dried up. He had opened his last bottle tonight and it had run out shortly after she had. His head soberly pounded with rage, with want. Without her.

If she found out, he was a dead man.

He grabbed an old globe with markings on it that looked nothing like Earth by the base and swung it into a grimy glass cabinet, shattering the doors and causing whatever was inside

to crash to the ground. A plume of dust rose up and Draco repeated his action again and again until he was heaving down air and only holding the bronze base of what had once been the globe.

If he hadn't been drunk that night he would never have even let her undo his shirt, but Sweet Salazar did her soft little hands feel amazing on his chest. Their light touch at first, tracing the lines of his muscles until she slid a hand up into his hair, dragging her nails across his head and nearly making him say something he would have surely regretted in the morning.

He grabbed a flask twice as large as his head and threw it as far as he could, listening to the crash and tinkle of glass as it sprayed across the useless and forgotten objects stored in here over the centuries. Draco froze with an icy anger. She had been so soft, so warm in his arms. She had been his. His hands twitched at his sides, empty and cold. He had to get his hands on her again.

He should have lied when she asked him that. If he had, maybe she would trust him and then she wouldn't have been spooked tonight. Is that what he wanted? Granger to trust him? Why? So she would... like him? No. That's not what this was. This was nothing more than fucking the stupid little Mudblood who bossed everyone around and thought she was so much better than anyone else because she read some shit books and couldn't stop spewing off at the mouth about them every fucking chance she got!

God, he hated her. Hated that she was taking up so much of his time. Hated that he had come to a stand still on the Vanishing Cabinet and couldn't get anything animate through it. Hated that his father was rotting away in a cell up north. Hated that his mother was stuck in the Manor with only her deranged sister and her family to talk to.

Hated the fucking mark on his arm that had made everything so damn complicated. Hated Dumbledore and his warm eyes that always seemed to find him. Did the old man know he was about to die? Did he think being *nice* was going to change the fact that Draco came back to Hogwarts with one intention this year and one intention only— Kill Albus Dumbledore.

But *she* had fucked it all up.

He grabbed a wingback chair and smashed it against the floor until it was just wooden shards and scraps of torn fabric. He stared down at the mess he had just made. He had thought about bending Granger over that chair more times than he could count over the past few months spent locked up in here. Her legs spread, stretching up to that cute little ass of hers. He could practically see her glancing over her shoulder at him through the thick curls with those fuck-me eyes...

*"I could **never** trust you."*

She was right. She couldn't trust him. He was a devious, cunning snake in the grass. And he planned to slither right back up her skirt the first chance he got. He had given her something no one else ever had and she had always come crawling back for more. She'd do that again. Lust like they shared didn't just go away. Pumping blood, hot breaths, the deep scorching ache he felt every time she was even near him... It just didn't go away and neither was he.

Bitch was going to get what she deserved. And he was going to give it to her.

Hermione was up early. Surprising, really, when she only got about a total of two and half hours of sleep. She pulled the curtains around her bed and then sat on it, staring at them for, well, she wasn't sure how long, but long enough for her eyes to grow tired and out of focus.

Last night had been... intense. Drunk Malfoy was nothing like she had thought he would be. Mercurial, changing from a sly smile to a spitting snake in seconds. That was it. He had been drunk. He hadn't meant what he had said about her being... *his*. And the look in his eyes, so... possessive and so clear, he hadn't been trying to hide it at all in the moment. *Had* he meant it?

She hung her head in her hands and sat on her bed. The same thoughts that had plagued her all night had not disappeared with the rosy morning light. Her coffee colored curls were more tangled than usual since she had tossed and turned all night and she tried to run her fingers through them, but stopped when she remembered the feel of Malfoy's silky hair.

It wouldn't be this hard if being with him wasn't so... great. There was no way around it; being with Malfoy made her feel warm and alight and alive. Not just the sex either, although that was a part of it, but being around him was... entertaining in a way. She had started to enjoy their bickering and last night was extremely interested in hearing his views on Muggleborns. Not that she thought they were correct in any way, but just hearing his side was strangely fascinating to her.

If he really believed that for those reasons, she was sure she could show him the flaws in that line of thinking.

What was she doing?! Why did she care about changing Malfoy's mind? He would never see her any differently and even if he did, they still were entirely two different people and would never be able to be... friends. Did she even want to be friends with him? Especially after last night... Ugh, what was this?

She took a deep breath and came at the problem the same way she came at her Arithmancy problems when she was stuck. Go back to the beginning and approach it from a different angle.

She didn't want to be friends with him. She didn't want *any* kind of relationship with him. After all, she couldn't trust him. And he did believe those things he said about Muggleborns. She had always known this about him; knew he was a cold, selfish person who only cared about himself. If he had his way, she would never have been accepted into Hogwarts and never learned about her magic. It would have withered and faded over the years and eventually turned dormant. Gone. Just like he wanted her to be.

There was no point in trying to discuss it further; Malfoy was a stubborn ass who wouldn't even entertain the idea of an open and honest discussion about Purebloods and Muggleborns even if she asked him to have one with her. They couldn't even talk to each other for more than ten minutes without fighting or—

She closed her eyes and swallowed, trying to slow the stem of thoughts that were spilling over into every corner of her mind. Something had changed after she had sex with him. Something had changed in her, in him, and in between them. She curled her legs up around her and bit her lip in thought. She didn't care that much about her reputation, but it would be

ruined if anyone had found out about her and Malfoy. She had seen the way people talked about the other girls he had... experiences with. When Harry had heard the rumor about him and Cho, even after they had broken up, the shaky friendship they were trying to salvage had fallen apart.

Would he do the same thing to her if he found out?

She had already lost Ron, she couldn't lose Harry too. Harry had been one of the few people who had been nice to her when she first arrived at Hogwarts. Ron, not so much, but after the troll on Halloween they had quickly all become inseparable. Now in their Sixth year, Ron wasn't speaking to her and Harry was obsessed with his book and his theory about Malfoy and she was... sleeping with him. Hermione hung her head.

"Don't take it off." His voice sounded in her head and she felt the coolness of his skin on her palms once more. Was there a reason why he hadn't wanted her to take his shirt off? Was that another one of his control games? Get her naked, but stay dressed?

He had chastised her about touching him in the past and those were merely accidents. Now that she thought about it he had only ever dropped his trousers low enough to take himself out and had never bared any more of his skin to her than necessary. Until last night. Something had been changed between them for sure.

"Mudblood whore."

Of course. He still saw her as dirty, disgusting, low. He had said it to her face last night and even that hadn't stopped her. He had called her plenty of names in their encounters before and she had even liked it some of the time, but that had been different. These words had been full of the same venom he had spat at her back in their earlier years at school; there had been no underlying playfulness or even an endearing edge to his tone. Hermione groaned. What was *wrong* with her?

"Hermione!" Ginny burst through the dormitory door and her head shot up right before she ripped the curtains back from around Hermione's bed.

Ginny's face was pale and her eyes were wide and wild.

"What's happened?" Hermione jumped up. "What's wrong?" Was it Harry? Was he alright? Was it... Voldemort?

"It's Ron," she choked out. Hermione's blood froze in her veins. "He's in the hospital wing."

She glanced over at Lavender's still sleeping form, curly blonde hair spilled out around her serene face. She paused, for only a moment. Lavender was his girlfriend, she would want to know that her boyfriend was sick or wounded or whatever had happened to Ron. If their places were switched, Hermione would have wanted to know.

She turned back to Ginny and grabbed a neatly folded jumper off of the dresser beside her.

"Let's go."

If Malfoy had regretted anything that he had said or did that night in the Restricted Section he made no indication of it. It seemed that he had completely returned to form and Hermione watched as he joked and laughed with Nott, Crabbe and Goyle trailing behind him like always. He hadn't even spared one glance in her direction, let alone try and apologize for his behavior. Not that she was around too much for him to even see her reaction. Hermione was spending most of her free time darting back and forth from the Hospital wing checking in on Ron.

Seeing him, lying there, bloodless with barely even shallow breaths passing between his pale lips had wrenched her heartstrings hard enough that the anger and resentment she had towards him melted into the background. She had thought she had lost Ron when he had chosen Lavender over her, but this time, she had actually almost lost him, for good.

"Hermione," Ron croaked as he pushed himself up slightly.

"Please, don't get up," She said quickly and reached behind him to fluff his pillow before he sank back down on it, a small smile on his still pale face. "How are you today?" she asked as she gently sat down on the side of his bed.

"Better, I think," he cleared his throat and Hermione played with her hands in her lap. Then his hand landed on top of hers. "Hermione, I wanted to—"

"I did your assignments for you," she mumbled quickly, feeling emotions well up in her.

"What? Wow. Really?" Ron asked in disbelief. "You didn't have to do that. I mean, I'm pretty sure the professors will understand if I'm a bit behind, being poisoned and all." He gave a small laugh but stopped when he saw the expression on her face.

"Well," she continued on, pulling a neat stack of parchment out of her bag. "You would have had to do them at some point, I know you're already behind. It'll be hard enough jumping back into lessons having missed so much so I—"

"I have," Ron said seriously and she glanced back at his clear blue eyes. "Missed so much."

Hermione breathed in a large breath and held it for a moment.

"It's nothing," she mumbled and began picking at her nails again.

"Oh. Okay." Ron said and leaned back.

She wanted to say something, but she wasn't sure what. She hadn't let herself deal with her feelings about Ron over the last few months, instead throwing herself into research for Harry, her coursework, and of course, Malfoy. Absentmindedly she touched the spot on her neck. It was healing, but slower than she'd like. He had done that on purpose, to mark her. To make her his.

"I should go." She stood up.

"Already?" Ron asked, his brows pulling together a little.

"I've got three pages of Runes to translate and—"

"That won't take you any time at all." Ron smiled warmly up at her and Hermione bit her lip to keep from smiling back at him.

Ron coughed again and shifted in the bed, adjusting the covers over him.

"Plus, I have two essays for Snape to write," she added.

"Two?" Ron asked. "He must be mad assigning two essays at the same... Oh." The rush of red flew up his neck, over his cheeks, and to the tips of his ears. She had forgotten how cute it was when he blushed.

"Don't worry, I've already got mine mostly done." She let the smile onto her face this time.

"Of course you do, Hermione." Ron leaned back into his pillow. "You'll never change, will you?"

Her smile faltered and fell.

"You know me," she said with a shrug and then grabbed her bag, making sure to place it on her good shoulder, the one without Malfoy's imprint on her skin, and made her way out of the Hospital wing.

"What are you two up to?" Hermione sat down next to Harry and Ginny on the squishy couch in front of the fireplace. After completing all her assignments for the week along with Ron's this evening, she decided to take a break and try and take her mind off of all of the heavy thoughts weighing her down.

"Talking about Malfoy," Harry answered quickly.

Well, there went her relaxing evening with her friends.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I've been watching him on the Map and it's the weirdest thing— What? Hermione, are you okay?" Harry asked her.

"What?" she asked breathlessly. "What? Yeah, fine... I'm fine." She quickly tried to adjust her expression and hoped that Harry and Ginny could not hear her heart hammering in her chest. Had Harry seen her with him on the Map? Oh God, if he had...

"Gin," Dean's voice sounded from the other side of the common room where he and Seamus were playing chess. "Come hang out with me."

"I'm busy right now," Ginny said and tossed her long hair over her shoulder. Hermione noticed the corner of Harry's mouth tug a little.

Dean's dark eyes moved from her to Harry and back. "Come on, I'm losing, I need my good luck charm." He forced a smile onto his face.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "He's losing because he's a bloody awful chess player, not that I'm his good luck charm," she muttered as she stood up. "Talk later, Hermione?" she asked and

walked over to Dean and Seamus. Dean pulled her onto his lap and lifted up his castle and had her kiss it before he placed it down on the board.

Hermione could almost feel the shift in Harry's demeanor as he quietly turned back around and stared down at the Map.

"She told me he's on her last nerve," Hermione whispered to him.

Harry gave her a half smile and adjusted his glasses. "Mine too," he muttered.

Hermione squeezed his hand in solidarity. "Tell me about Malfoy," she summoned the courage to say. Godric knew she didn't want to talk about him, but if it stopped Harry from brooding any more than he already did, then she would. She loved Harry and couldn't help but want to know about what he had seen on the Map. Maybe it was better that they were having this conversation on their own, just in case.

"Sometimes he just... disappears. Like he's gone. I don't know how he's doing it," Harry said, the frustration clear in his voice.

"Gone?" Hermione asked.

"Yeah, I can't imagine he's leaving the school, but I'll search the whole map over and he's nowhere to be found."

"Is he on there now?" Hermione hated herself for asking, but she had to admit, she was a little curious about what Malfoy was up to.

"Yeah, here." Harry pointed to a classroom on the fourth floor. A small dot with the label Draco Malfoy was standing almost on top of another dot labeled Pansy Parkinson. Hermione's heart dropped to her feet. She hadn't given much thought to Malfoy moving back to other girls, but having to see it so blatantly in front of her was oddly upsetting.

"Have they... been there long?" Why was her mouth so suddenly dry?

"Twenty minutes or so," he shrugged. "Look, Lavender's in the Hospital wing with Ron. Hopefully he's not pretending to be asleep this time. She's driving me crazy asking about him. Between her and McLaggen bugging me about Quidditch—"

Hermione didn't hear what he was saying. Lavender was visiting Ron, their dots almost as close as Malfoy's and Pansy's were. How had she gotten herself into this mess? Her chest ached with all the emotions rolling through it and she sighed heavily.

"—He's got to be. No other option at this point," Harry went on.

"What?"

"Look, I know you don't think so, but how else would he be able to fool the Map without using some sort of Dark Magic?" Harry cleared the Map and folded it back. "Malfoy's a Death Eater, I'm telling you."

"Harry," Hermione's shoulders slumped.

"Okay then what's your theory?" he retorted. "If yours is better than mine, then I'll drop it." He stared at her with earnest green eyes, almost pleading with her to believe him.

"I... I don't have one!" Hermione said. "I just don't think that You-Know-Who would induct a sixteen year old boy—" There was nothing left of a boy in Malfoy and she knew it. "Into the ranks of his followers. I just don't see it happening!"

"You don't know Voldemort like I do," Harry grumbled and turned to face the fire, staring into it with a dark expression.

Hermione moved closer to him. "Harry, are you having the dreams again?"

"Doesn't matter," he mumbled and tucked the map into his pocket. "Would you even believe me if I said I was?"

"Of course!" Hermione grabbed his hand and his expression softened a little. "Harry, I... I believe you. I believe *in* you. I just don't believe that Draco Malfoy is a Death Eater. It has nothing to do with you."

Harry looked over at her and the darkness on his face faded as the warm light of the fire reflected off his glasses.

"Thanks, Hermione," he sighed and wrapped his arm around her. "Sorry I've been so... crazy lately. You know how I get."

"Yeah, I do," Hermione laughed a little and relaxed back into the couch with him. "But you've got to remember, we're on your side."

"We?" Harry asked and looked down at her.

"Yeah, Ron and I." Something sparked in Harry's emerald eyes and she saw the corner of his mouth tug again. "Both of us. We'll always be with you."

"Thanks." Harry smiled and Hermione returned it warmly. "Hey, have you finished the Herbology essay?" She nodded. "Think you can help me with mine?"

Draco roared and threw the bottle of Butterbeer against the Vanishing Cabinet sending flecks of white foam all over it as the golden liquid ran down the dark wood and dripped thick drops onto the floor. It was all he could get right now, but it wasn't enough. He needed something stronger. He needed...

No.

She was still being an uptight little bitch and he wasn't going to be the one to grovel first. Sure, he'd say what he needed to say to get back in between her thighs, but she had to come to him. He ran his hand through his white blonde hair and closed his eyes, trying to steady his breathing.

One.

Two.

Three.

Three breaths, just like his Mother had taught him. His face relaxed, but the tension was still there just under the surface. His shoulders lowered, but the muscles were still tight and he

could feel his blood moving through him at a faster pace than normal. After another moment he felt it start to slow as well.

His Mother had taught him at an early age how to control himself. She had to, least he throw a fit in front of his father and bring on his wrath. They always had to be on their best behavior in front of him, both of them.

She would spend hours with tailors, dressing him in the finest garments just for a dinner for the three of them. Draco learned etiquette and manners; he learned their family history and Pureblood traditions so that he would be a fitting son to his father. But nothing he had ever done had been good enough for Lucius Malfoy. So he *had* to fix this Cabinet, he had to. If he did this, then the Dark Lord would allow his father to come home and finally, he might be able to see pride gleam in his father's pale grey eyes.

But what would he be coming home to? Bellatrix, Rodolphus, and Rabastan had been pushing their limits when he was at home over break and he could only assume it had gotten worse over the past couple of months. His mother's letters never mentioned them, but her terseness in them let him know that all was not well in Malfoy Manor.

He wondered if his aunt had told his mother what he had done Christmas night. He tried not to think about it. Tried not to picture that Muggle family's faces as the children cried and tried to hide behind their Mother while their Father screamed and twitched in agony in front of them.

Bellatrix had said he had done well.

Draco rubbed his eyes and leaned his head against the Vanishing Cabinet. The more stressed he became over the Cabinet and his task, the less he was able to block out the memories of his... training. And without Granger as a distraction, they were creeping back in steadily.

Bellatrix had set the Muggle family's Christmas tree on fire, letting it burn while she cackled and the curtains caught. The Mother tried to comfort the children, but they screamed and clung to her as Rabastan hauled her away into one of the rooms, laughing sickly and slamming the door behind him. It hadn't mattered; they all heard her screaming anyways.

Draco had remembered his Mother's lessons well that night, keeping his face apathetic and his eyes cold as he watched the blood begin to trickle out of the man's ears and mouth. The screams had stopped two *Crucios* ago.

"I will tell the Dark Lord of your commitment to the cause," His uncle had said as a heavy hand rested on Draco's shoulder, his wand still pointed at the ruined man. It took everything he had not to throw his uncle's hand off of him. His aunt danced in front of the flames, spinning and turning, her twisted curls fanning out around her as she kicked a porcelain angel that had fallen to the floor.

"What about them?" Draco nodded in the direction of the two small children huddled together with wide, wet faces.

"Who cares?" Bellatrix sneered and spat on the floor in front of them.

Rabastan walked out of the room as the fire began to spread, sighing happily and fixing his robes back over himself. "Merlin, thought she'd never stop crying. Had to shut her up the old

fashioned way.” He wiped a bloody hand on his black robes. Rodolphus shared a low dark laugh with his brother, but Draco could not find it in himself to join in.

“Let’s go,” Rodolphus waved his hand in front of his face, dispelling the smoke that was gathering there.

Draco followed them out of the house. He did not look back to see if the children had moved from their huddled position on the floor. If he didn’t know then he could pretend that they all got out before the flames spread, but he had felt the heat on his back as they walked away. He knew.

He swallowed down the awful sick feeling inside of him. The burning ache on his arm seemed to intensify for a moment, but he knew it was just because he was concentrating on it. He had felt the Dark Lord call him once after he took the mark and that pain was unable to be ignored. This pain was of his own making.

He just had to fix the Cabinet. Once he did that, he could complete his task and make a quick get away through it. He would report to his Master and tell him of the success of his plan and then... What? He would still be bound to him, his will. He would still be a Death Eater, torturing and killing... It would not end, it was just beginning.

And once Dumbledore was dead it wouldn’t be long before the Dark Lord began making moves. He had spoken of reforming the Ministry and rounding up Mudbloods into prisons for trials and sentencing. Sentencing for what? Why not snap their wands, obliviate them, and send them back to the Muggles they came from? Draco shook his head; he couldn’t think like that. They were Mudbloods and had to be punished for that reason. Because it was what the Dark Lord commanded. Because it’s what they deserved.

What would happen to Granger? Surely she would fight with the Order. Would she be killed in battle or one of the ones rounded up and confined in cages? He pictured Granger’s toffee curls matted with dirt and blood and her big brown eyes hollowed and scared as she looked up at him through iron bars. Could he just... leave her to her fate? Or would he try and do something?

Would she even let him?

Of course not. She didn’t trust him. The image of Granger’s pale face twisted and changed to the same wary look she had in the Restricted Section. He closed his eyes, pushing the dark thoughts from his mind. He had enough to deal with right now without worrying about what was going to happen to Granger once he murdered Dumbledore and unleashed his Lord on the world.

If he had just kept his fucking mouth shut she’d be on her knees for him right now but instead he had lashed out at her, wanting to hurt her like she— No. Granger had *not* hurt him. Granger had... Draco sighed. What *had* she done to him?

It took everything in him to not to stare at her the past few days. Her quick pace as she made she made her way between classes only made him think about how fucking soft her thighs were under that long skirt. The look of determination on her face as she furiously took notes on things she already knew just made him want to sink himself back into her and watch as her eyes widened and her mouth opened as she came underneath him.

How she could look like some innocent little nerdy girl when he knew the sound of her moan intimately was nothing less than shocking. If other guys knew what an absolute dish she was under her oversized sweaters he would have to curse each and every one of them to keep them off of her. Because she was his. He had taken her and had no plans of giving her up.

Sweet Salazar, he was a wreck.

Fuck it. It was useless. She was too bloody proud and stubborn to come to him. Her fucking Gryffindor pride would never let her crawl back to him after what he had said to her. Why had that bothered him so much, the fact that she didn't trust him? So fucking what? Why should he care that the warm cinnamon in her eyes had flashed brightly then dimmed the moment he had called her a Mudblood whore. He had said worse to her before, hadn't he? But that had been before... As much as he didn't want to admit it, things were different now.

Draco clenched his jaw. Her admission that she could *never* trust him had wounded something inside of him. What the fuck was that? He thought he had dealt with his little '*feelings*' issue by dismissing it as a confused sense of lust for the girl. Mudblood. For the Mudblood.

He had tried to replace her, but fire whisky didn't burn half as sweet as she did. Hell, he had even thought about fucking Pansy again just to try and get some relief but she wouldn't stop pestering him about his mystery girl. One slip up in front of Blaise and he spread the gossip worse than his mother's catty friends and now it was all anyone would talk about. Pansy's jealousy had not helped either.

He sank down to the floor, not caring that he was sitting in spilled Butterbeer and pulled another one out, cracking it open and downing half the bottle as quickly as he could. It wasn't fire whisky, but it was better than nothing.

Because without Granger, that's all he had left. Nothing.

She was running down the dark hallway, Ron was right behind her.

"Go! Go, Hermione, go!" he shouted, urging her on. "There!" He pointed to a door and they ducked inside.

"Where's Harry?" Hermione asked breathlessly.

"I don't know," Ron muttered darkly. "But we need to get out of here."

She could hear thundering footsteps coming from the door they had just run through. She tried to raise her wand to seal it, but her body was moving too slow.

Three Death Eaters burst in, black robes whipping around them and cruel metal masks over their faces.

"There they are!" one of the Death Eaters yelled.

"RUN!" Ron bellowed and grabbed her by the arm, hauling her up with him as they dodged streaming curses around them.

“Ron!” Hermione yelled as he tripped and fell.

“Go Hermione!” he yelled, trying to push himself up. “Get out of here!”

Hermione ran. She was running and running and running, but had no idea where to. She couldn’t hear anything but her labored breathing. Suddenly, she was in a different room. Not a room... she was in the Restricted Section. Large stacks of books towered over her, leading her down dark and gloomy pathways.

“Ron?” she called out, slowing down. “Ron, where are you?”

No answer. Hermione wandered down one of the narrow paths, glancing around quickly for any sign of friend or foe.

Someone grabbed her from behind, pinning her arms to her side with their strong arms. Hermione struggled against them, but they only held her tighter, pulling her against their solid body. Hermione looked over her shoulder to see a cold unfeeling mask staring back at her.

She gasped. In the mask were a pair of deep silver eyes.

“Mine.”

“What are you doing up here?” Luna’s dreamy voice interrupted Hermione’s thoughts.

“What?” she spun quickly and saw the pale gold of Luna’s hair before her large luminous eyes met her gaze with a strange hold in them. “Oh, just... couldn’t sleep.”

Luna nodded as if it was the most normal thing in the world to wander the Astronomy tower before dawn.

“What are you doing?” Hermione asked, trying to break the silence.

“I like to watch the sunrise,” Luna said softly, placing her hands on the railing and breathing deeply. “Smells nice.”

“The sunrise?” Hermione asked.

Luna nodded again, her long blonde hair moving slightly with her. Hermione tried to smell anything, but only the crisp cool air met her. Something tightened in her stomach. Nerves, maybe? More like... anticipation.

“Why couldn’t you sleep?” Luna asked her, looking out over the grounds.

Hermione shifted on her feet slightly. “Dreams.” She didn’t really talk about the nightmares she had about the Department of Mysteries. She didn’t want anyone to think less of her. Although she knew they would deny it, it still worried her. Harry was so brave and Ron was full of heart... They had no problem throwing themselves into the fight. “Nightmares, actually.”

Luna stared at her with her wide eyes, knowing without having to be told.

“Watching the sun rise is the best way to start a day. Especially after a night of bad dreams.”

Hermione sighed and moved to stand beside Luna, gazing out over the dark grounds. This dream had upset her in a different way though. She knew those eyes, she knew that voice. But it was just a dream.

She had woken up to a glaring Lavender. Knowing she must have been calling Ron's name again, Hermione quickly dressed and made her way out of the dormitory. It wasn't uncommon for her to get up before the sun, oftentimes visiting the Library in the early hours of the morning. But she knew she couldn't keep distracting herself with books and research forever; she was going to have to deal with these thoughts soon.

"Do you ever do anything... bad?" Hermione found herself asking.

Luna smiled a little. "Sometimes I take food from the Great Hall and feed the Grindylows in the Lake."

Hermione let out a low breath. "I mean something that you know is wrong, but do it anyways."

"Why is it wrong?" Luna asked.

Hermione paused. Why was this wrong? Because it was with Malfoy, that's why. "Because if people I care about found out, it would hurt them that I did it."

Luna twisted her lips in thought and stared out over the grounds for a few long moments. "But it's a good thing for you?"

Hermione was thrown off by the question, but knew the answer. "Yes. It's good for me. At least, I think so."

"Well if the people you care about care about you too, then they should understand."

"You make it sound so simple," Hermione gave a dry laugh.

Luna shrugged. "Maybe it is."

"Then why does it feel so complicated?" Hermione leaned down on the railing.

Luna copied her. "You have a lot of thoughts up there, Hermione," Luna said in her dreamy voice. "It must get very busy. Very lonely too."

Hermione's breath caught in her throat. Luna never ceased to amaze her with her skills of perception.

"Sometimes," she mumbled. Without Malfoy she didn't know how she would have gotten through the past few months.

"And this bad thing, it makes you less lonely?"

"Yes," Hermione whispered.

"Then it's not all bad." Luna concluded. "Oh look, there it is." Her voice drifted into the distance and Hermione looked where Luna was pointing.

Over the Lake, the first rosy rays of the sun began to rise.

Hermione hurried down the corridor. It was late. She had spent too long in the Hospital wing with Ron, but he had looked so disappointed when she had gotten up to leave that she tried to forget that he was still with Lavender for a little while longer and stayed with him until Madam Pomfrey ushered her out.

Normally she was in bed at this point, but instead she was rushing to the Prefect's bath walking as quickly as she could. She was surprised when she heard Pansy's bark-like laugh coming from inside and quickly ducked around a suit of armor, not wanting a confrontation with her right now.

"We should do that more often," a male voice said and Pansy giggled. "Especially now that I don't have to share you with Draco anymore."

"Draco," Pansy huffed. 'Thinks he can do better than me? Right. I'm the only girl who knows who to handle him the way he wants to be handled.' There was an uncomfortably silence in which Hermione did her best not to let her imagination get away from her. "Theo, don't pout."

She heard him huff angrily. Theo... Theodore Nott; that's who the male voice must belong to.

"What, are you jealous?"

Hermione fought the turning in her stomach at Pansy's saccharine tone.

"Like you aren't?" Nott countered. "Draco's all wrapped up in his mystery girl according to Blaise and I heard he tossed you aside."

"He'll be back," Pansy snapped. "He always comes back. We had a fight, yes, but... I know what he likes."

"Yeah? And what about me?" Nott said in a low voice.

"I know what you like too," Pansy said softly and Hermione gagged at the wet noises of their kiss.

"Come on, let's get back so I can fuck you in the bed next to his. See how Draco likes hearing you call out my name instead of his."

They laughed together and passed by her without noticing her tucked away, clutching her change of clothes up to her chest. Once they were far enough away Hermione stepped out from behind the suit of armor and made her way to the Prefect's bath and ducked inside quickly.

She let her mind fill with thoughts as the large tub filled with warm water and opalescent bubbles.

That's what she must have seen on the Marauder's Map when Malfoy and Pansy's dots had been in that classroom together, their fight. About his mystery girl. He had mentioned that he talked when he drank and he might have let something slip about her... but they clearly had no indication who his mystery girl was and for that Hermione sent up a silent prayer of thanks as she ran her hand over the warm water, testing it before stepping in.

Just because Malfoy wasn't sleeping with Pansy didn't change anything. He had still said those terrible, hurtful things to her and then... Hermione's mind spun furiously. He had been almost friendly, or as friendly as Malfoy got, before she had had that she didn't trust him. Was there something else going on with him?

Hermione dipped her head under the water and let herself submerge in it, the warmth covering her and seeping into her slowly before she broke the surface, pushing her waterlogged curls back out of her face. Why did it matter if there was something else going on with Malfoy? Why should she care? He was rude and horrid. He was a purist who would see her cast out of wizarding society in a heartbeat.

Not to mention he might be a Death Eater. Not now at least, but someday. Although, Harry had been right about things like this in the past... Still, having sex with Draco Malfoy was bad enough. She didn't think she could face herself if she had sex with a Death Eater too. It was unimaginable.

The warm water was so relaxing the bubbles smelled like freshly picked lavender. Hermione felt herself begin to relax. She sat on the small seat in the large bath and leaned her head back, resting it on the cool floor behind her. She had been so tense this week, what with worrying about Ron and doing two loads of coursework. Not to mention that Ginny had come into her room crying because she and Dean had fought again and Hermione spent half the night listening to her vent.

She wished she had some sort of outlet. Harry, Ron, and Ginny all had Quidditch to throw themselves into when they were stressed and they always came back from practice smiling easier and laughing louder. She had something like that, for a while, with Malfoy. But she had promised herself that she was done with that now.

Even if it had been wrong it had felt so *good*. And maybe like Luna said, it wasn't all bad. Hermione's hand moved over her stomach and she felt a familiar clenching inside of her. It wasn't wrong if she was doing it to herself, even if she was thinking of him. After all, it was the only experience she had to draw on.

"Means your mine."

Her fingers started off slow but quickly gained speed as she replayed how Malfoy had touched her over and over. She bit down on her lip, remembering how he had taken it in his teeth and pulled until she whimpered, how he had grabbed it and told her to behave.

She swallowed hard and moved her hand faster. His hand had been rough coming down on her, smacking her ass over and over until she had cried out for him, but still wanted more.

"Your pussy feels so good."

It was like he was speaking the words right into her again with his deep voice, hoarse yet still commanding. Always in control, always in charge. She liked that. She needed that. And it did feel so *good*. She bit back a moan and her back arched up a little. It was good, but she liked his hand better.

"My fingers or my cock? Which did you miss more?"

The water splashed around her neck, lapping gently at the mark he had left that was still healing. She wished she could have felt him inside her one more time. Maybe they were alike.

He had fit so well.

“My little Gryffindor kitten.”

She bit her lip harder, trying to keep her noises in, but her breathing was already labored and a small high-pitched moan escaped her. She wanted to run her hands over his chest again, feel those marble carved muscles under her fingers and then run them up his shoulders and into his hair to make him groan like she had before. She wanted to pull him down on top of her as he sunk himself deep inside, filling her, giving her everything, everything she so desperately wanted.

“Draco...” she moaned out as she came and gasped, open mouthed, trying to fill her chest with air as it rippled through her.

She didn’t feel as satisfied as when he had done it to her, but she had made up her mind. She was never going to have him again and so this is what she was left with. It wasn’t the same, but it was something.

Eventually Hermione lifted herself from the pearl like bubbles and warm water and towed off. She walked into the changing room and padded over to the cabinet she had placed her clothes in. Waving her wand, the door opened for her and she reached in.

Her hand stopped mid air.

On top of her clothes were a pair of white cotton knickers. She opened her tawny eyes wide as her hands moved on their own accord, picking them up. They were hers. From that night. She turned them over and something cold and simultaneously hot passed from the top of her head to the tip of her toes.

Written on the back of them in stark black ink was a single word: ***“Mine.”***

13. thirteen

Chapter 13

Draco grabbed the bottle of Ogden's Fire Whisky from the Vanishing Cabinet and slammed it shut. He still wasn't able to get anything animate through, but at least it gave him a steady supply of alcohol now. Borgin charged him out the ass for every bottle, but he wasn't running out and he didn't have to rely on Theo to smuggle them in anymore either.

He and Pansy were making quite the show out of their sex life these days and it was starting to grate on Draco. He wished he still had Granger's knickers. He wanted to spill himself into them since that was the closest he could fucking get to her these days. She had spent the last week ignoring him and avoiding all of her usual haunts. He knew because he had been checking. Obsessively.

He pulled the cork out and threw it somewhere. Whatever. The Room of Hidden Things was a mess already; a cork or two wasn't going to make a difference. He turned the bottle up and let the fiery burn scorch his throat for a moment before wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and grimacing until the liquor hit his bloodstream and soaked into his brain.

That was better.

He wished he could have seen the utter shock on her cute little face when she found the knickers. He might not be a Prefect anymore, but Pansy was more than willing to tell him the password to the baths in hopes that he would join her. When Draco had spotted Granger rushing through the halls he couldn't help but follow her.

He had hardly been able to control himself when he watched her strip and sink into the water. He cursed the opalescent bubbles for hiding her body from him and wondered if she would have noticed if he cast a few vanishing spells to thin them out when she had erased every thought from his head as her hand moved under the water.

Watching Granger fuck herself had him beating off from behind the rack of fluffy white towels he was hiding in, trying to hold out and not shoot himself across the floor while she was taking her time. Small gasping breaths and a high pitched moan were the most beautiful form of torture he had ever thought he could endure. And then... she had called his name. *His name.*

She didn't trust him, but she fucked herself to him. He could work with that.

He walked down the stairs heavily as he made his way down into the dungeons, bottle swinging in his hand. Was he inviting trouble? Yes. Did he care? No. Right now he didn't care about anything but getting Granger to fuck him again. He took another drink and felt it burn, but it didn't burn half as good as she did. He had complained before about the way she made him feel, but found himself almost... missing the ways she scorched herself across his soul.

Sweet Salazar, *across his soul*? What was wrong with him?

Nothing. Just drunk. He shrugged it off.

"What's up, Blaise?" Draco gave him a crooked smile as he threw himself down on the couch across from Blaise.

"Where'd you get that?" Blaise frowned and nodded to the bottle in Draco's hand.

"I have my ways." Draco smirked and held it out. "Want some?"

Blaise's eyes were dark and watchful. He reached out a long arm and took the bottle, taking a drink and handing it back.

"So I guess you're done drying out," Blaise said tonelessly.

"Who are you, my mother?" Draco snapped and gulped down more of the amber liquid. Blaise was no angel himself, but he did give Draco disapproving looks whenever he stumbled into their dorm, drunk and barely making it to his bed before he collapsed.

"Thankfully no." Blaise leaned back. "But I am your friend."

Draco snorted. "Okay."

"I am."

He looked over to Blaise. If Draco didn't know better, he'd almost say he was being sincere.

"Then drink, *friend*." Draco smirked mirthlessly and handed the bottle back over. Blaise took another small drink, but didn't pass it back.

"What's your mystery girl think of you getting pissed every night?"

Draco bristled at the mention of Granger. He had to be careful; last time he had drank with Blaise he had let it slip that he was fucking a new girl who put all the rest to shame. Blaise had been very interested and asked way too many fucking questions before Draco realized he was answering them. Honestly.

"Not really concerned with what's here," he tapped his temple. "Only concerned with what's *there*." He chuckled and reached for the bottle again. Blaise hesitated before handing it over.

"Thought you liked this one," he said.

Draco rolled his eyes. "I like her bent over." Merlin, he was glad Granger couldn't hear the way he talked about her. Or maybe, she'd like it. After all, she had been... surprising.

Blaise laughed but Draco was oddly aware of his dark eyes watching him intently. "If you say so."

"I do," Draco snapped. "So shut the fuck up about it."

Blaise held up his hands in surrender.

"Why are you so interested in where I'm sticking my dick?" He reached for the bottle again, but Blaise lifted it away, pretending to want more.

Draco's mind was well numbed, but he could tell that his *friend* was either taking small sips or only bringing it to his closed lips.

Blaise shrugged noncommittally. "You were starting to become tolerable up until this past week. You two have a row?" he asked and pretended to drink again.

Draco narrowed his eyes slightly and snatched the bottle back. "We're fine," he growled. He shouldn't be drinking and talking with Blaise. But for some reason, he found it difficult not to talk about her right now. And since when did he say *we* when talking about Granger?

"Well, I'm sure it's your fault," Blaise said with a small laugh.

Draco glared at him. "What makes you say that?" he snapped. It wasn't his fault. Granger had been the one who had started it with her smart mouth. He took a swig from the bottle. The things he wanted to do with her mouth...

"Because you're you," Blaise said simply, but his dark eyes glittered. "You're an asshole, you know that right?"

Draco scoffed. "Only when she's being a bitch." Why was he talking about this?!

"Well if she can put up with you then she must be sent from above," Blaise smirked. 'Either way,' he went on before Draco could argue. "Sitting here and getting pissed again isn't going to help your case. Get off your ass and do something if you want her back."

Draco blinked and stared at Blaise. Since when did Blaise offer him advice? Since when did Blaise offer him *good* advice? Draco had never really seen him as more than an... associate, but here they were, acting like friends. No. Draco didn't *do* friends, just like he didn't do girlfriends. Or apologies.

But if Granger hadn't been a Mudblood and Gryffindor would he change his mind?

He let the fire whisky burn him again and tried not to think about how pink Granger's lips had gotten after she tried it. Or how they tasted. Or how soft they were when he bit down on them. Or how they looked with his cock in between them. *Shit*, he needed to get himself together before he started saying these things out loud.

"Who says I want her back? Maybe I'm tired of her."

Blaise had an almost bored looking expression on his dark aristocratic features. "The fact that the girls aren't walking bow legged anymore tells me you're still hung up on her."

Draco laughed. "I've just had better things to do." He tried to play it off, but since Granger, Draco had been off his game. Is that why he was still playing by Granger's rules? Or was it because no one else had interested him? Not since her.

"Sure. That's why you've been moping around and snarling at anyone in a five foot radius. At least when you were fucking this mystery girl you were halfway decent." Blaise raised an eyebrow. "I've got to say, I'm curious who this girl is if she can turn your head and keep it there. She must be something special."

Draco felt the whisky slipping a smirk onto his face. "Yeah, she is."

Hermione tapped her quill against her roll of parchment absentmindedly. Harry had gone over what had happened in Slughorn's office when Ron got poisoned dozens of times and Hermione had listened carefully, trying to pick up on some clue that they were missing out on. Students were getting attacked and Hogwarts did not feel like the safe place it had once been.

Katie with the necklace and Ron with the mead had been... lucky. There was no other way to put it than that. Both should have been fatal, but neither had accomplished the goal that they had set out to do. She rubbed her forehead where a headache was growing.

Whoever was behind these attacks was reckless and... dangerous. They didn't care about casualties or innocent people getting hurt as long as their goal was accomplished. Hermione wondered if the next attempt would result in another hospitalization or in a death this time. If someone was killed there was no way that the school would be allowed to stay open. It barely had in her second year and that was before all the rumors and articles on disappearances and incidents.

The war was fast approaching. They all felt it, they all knew it. Harry was growing more sullen and sat there for hours, brooding over the Map where Hermione knew he was watching Malfoy. Her head pounded behind her eyes. She was terrified that Harry would be looking at the Map the next time that Malfoy found her. She sighed and sat her quill down. Because she knew, deep down, there would be a next time.

Whatever it was that was going on between her and Malfoy she couldn't stop it. She wanted it just as much as he did and with stress piling up on her she knew that she *needed* it.

But as much as she wanted to, she couldn't bring herself to regret what she had done with Malfoy. The changes she had felt, the flames inside of her were burning steadily and she liked the confidence that she was beginning to gain from her experiences with him. How was it that even though his hands were rough and his words degrading, she still left feeling... empowered?

She was more sure of herself now. She had never been afraid to speak her mind or boss other people around, but now she felt a certainty, an assurance in herself that she hadn't really had before. Or maybe she had and Malfoy just... encouraged it. She knew she was changing, but it felt like she was becoming more herself than she ever had been before.

After a long week of balancing schoolwork and frequent trips to the hospital wing to visit Ron Hermione was feeling worn down and ragged, but could not make sleep come no matter how she tossed and turned. Almost losing Ron had made her nightmares more frequent, but now instead of running along the dark hallways of the Department of Mysteries, she dreamt about the twisting stacks of the Restricted Section.

And instead of Ron, it was Draco's name she was shouting. And sometimes moaning.

Hermione sighed and threw herself back flat onto the bed, eyes burning as they strained in the darkness. Why did Malfoy have to be so horrible? If he was only a few degrees better she might be able to tolerate him. But he had turned so cruel, so quickly... what could have caused that? He had made it perfectly clear that this arrangement they had didn't change anything about the way they felt about each other so why would he be upset if she didn't trust him?

Malfoy didn't care about anyone but himself, everyone knew that... but his face, he had been... disappointed, hurt even. Still, that didn't give him a good enough excuse to lash out at her like he had. Or sneak into the Prefect's bath and leave that note on her knickers. Those same knickers were buried at the very bottom of her trunk. Godric, if anyone ever saw them... if Ron ever found out...

Hermione sat up. Had that been his way of apologizing? Letting her know that he didn't hold anything against her? But she hadn't even done anything wrong! If he thought she was just going to give in easily he had another thing coming. She wasn't even going to consider letting him touch her again until he clearly said that he was sorry for what he had said to her and what he had called her. No exception. But if he did... She threw herself back against the pillows with a huff. Resigning herself to the fact that she wasn't getting any sleep tonight and pulled out a "*New Theory of Numerology*" and whispered a quick "*Lumos*", letting her mind sink down into her book and away from the thoughts that had kept her up until the wee hours of the morning.

Hermione walked down to the Quidditch Pitch with Ginny, chatting about the game and how much of a pain Cormac McLaggen had been the past week at practices. By the time they reached the Gryffindor changing rooms they were both in a fit of giggles that wouldn't stop.

"Where's Harry?" Hermione asked, peering in.

"Talking to Ron," Ginny answered. "Ensuring him his place on the team once he gets better!" she added loudly causing Hermione to cover her mouth to stop another fit from coming on Cormac's lecturing voice sounded from deeper inside.

"Well tell him I said good luck." Hermione smiled brightly. "You too, Gin." She gave her a quick hug and backed out of the room to find a good place in the stands to watch the game. Now that Ron and Ginny were both on the team she tried to watch the match with Neville or sometimes Luna. She had strangely felt a little better after their talk on the Astronomy Tower and found herself wanting to spend more time with the strange but oddly sweet Ravenclaw.

She reached the foot of the stairs leading up to the stands when she felt a tug at her elbow and then arms wrapped around her in a hauntingly familiar feeling as she was pulled roughly to the side and through the draped banners covering the frame of the stands.

"Malfoy!" Hermione snarled as he pulled her further in and spun her around. She tore herself from his grasp and took a few steps back from him before realizing she was moving away from the seam he had pulled her through and deeper under the stands were he clearly wanted her. "Get away from me."

"I just want to talk," he said, holding his hands up.

"I don't think so," she snapped and made to move past him, but Malfoy blocked her path.

"Five minutes. That's all I need."

"I know," she said nastily.

Malfoy smirked at her. "Now, we both know that's not true."

“Stay away from me.” Hermione glared at him and tried the other side, but Malfoy blocked her again.

“I listened to you when you wanted to talk, it’s only fair that you do the same.”

Hermione opened her mouth to snap at him, but then closed it. He was technically right, but she still didn’t want to talk to him. And she remembered how *that* night had ended up.

Malfoy’s eyes gleamed as he saw that he had gotten to her.

Hermione glared at him. “Three minutes.”

“Done.” He said it so simply that Hermione blinked. “I want to talk about what happened.”

Hermione merely stared at him. He had asked her to listen to him, not to converse with him.

“I was upset,” he started and Hermione had the distinct impression he had practiced this little speech beforehand. “I had a bad day. I was drinking.”

She kept her silence and just watched him as he searched her face for any clue as to what she was thinking.

“So... obviously you should move past it.”

Hermione let out a sharp laugh. “That’s it? That’s what you wanted to say to me?”

Malfoy looked surprised. “Well, yeah.”

“Okay, Malfoy.” She shook her head. “Well if that’s all then—”

“Wait!” He put his hand out in front of him as she started forward again. Hermione eyed him. “No, that’s not all. Okay, let me try again. I was upset about things, not about you and —”

“Either say you’re sorry or get out of the way.”

Malfoy stared at her for half a second. Clearly this was not the way he had envisioned their talk going.

“I’m not the only one who needs to apologize.”

“What have I got to apologize for?” Hermione shouted and then stopped. She could hear the feet of dozens of students above them, finding their seats talking excitedly.

Draco seemed to be thinking the same thing as her and took a step closer to her, lowering his voice as he spoke. “You left me there with the biggest fucking hard on—”

“Oh I’m sure you found someone to help you out with that. Maybe one of the girls you’re always slagging it up with,” she spat.

“Slagging it up?” Malfoy asked, amused. “Look at you, using big girl words.”

Hermione scoffed and rolled her eyes before glaring at him.

“I kept to your rules.” Malfoy said suddenly, surprising her. “I was just... I didn’t fuck anyone else.” His tone changed. It wasn’t the same self assured one he had approached her

with before; there was something deeper in it now.

“Would you like a trophy for keeping it in your pants?” Hermione felt the anger rising up in her.

“I could have, but I didn’t. Doesn’t that count for something?” he asked. Hermione was thrown off by this question. What was he trying to do here?

“That’s not the point,” Hermione argued.

“Okay so then what’s your point?” Malfoy asked.

“You need to apologize to me.” Hermione lifted her chin.

“You need to get down off your high horse, you self righteous— Okay okay!” Malfoy stepped in front of her again as she tried to brush past him. “I don’t do apologies.”

“Just like you don’t do girlfriends?” Hermione retorted and then immediately felt a jolt in her stomach.

“What does that have to do with this?” He asked, pulling his head back.

“Nothing,” Hermione answered quickly. “Just that there’s a lot of things you don’t do, that’s all.”

“Like you’re so perfect yourself,” he said sarcastically.

“You said I was.” She knew it was low to bring that up and by the brief shock on Malfoy’s face she knew she had landed a blow. The crisp spring air was heavy between them for a moment and the sounds of the match overhead penetrated their argument.

He gathered himself quickly and returned to the defensive. “You got what you’re going to get,” he sneered at her.

“You too then,” Hermione answered waspishly.

“Oh come on, Granger,” Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Like you’ve never said anything you didn’t mean when you were mad.”

She thought about the birds she had sent after Ron and the harsh barbs they had thrown back and forth over the past few months. “I... well... That’s not the point! We aren’t talking about me, we’re talking about you!” Hermione stood her ground.

“I was drunk.” He said it like it perfectly explained why he had said what he did.

“So what you’re saying is you didn’t mean what you said to me?” Hermione crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes.

Malfoy paused for a moment, studying her face. “That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

“Then say it.” Hermione retorted.

He pinched his lips in frustration and breathed out. “I didn’t mean it, Granger.”

“Didn’t mean what?” Hermione raised her eyebrows. She wasn’t letting him get away with this.

His lids lowered a little over his granite grey eyes. "I didn't mean it when I called you a Mudblood whore."

His expression was reserved, but she was starting to learn to recognize small hints of things on his face. Something there made her think that maybe, just *maybe*, he was telling the truth.

"And?" she asked patiently.

He gritted his teeth. "And that you open your legs for me whenever I say."

"Look in your direction were your exact words, but yes." Hermione corrected him. "And you bit me."

"You liked it." Draco gave her a smug smirk.

Hermione couldn't deny it. She had let the mark on the base of her neck heal on its own when she could have easily cast a healing charm on it and had it gone in a day. But for some reason, she had left it there, slowly watching the skin knit itself back together with soft pink lines.

"And you like me," Draco added.

"Hardly," Hermione said derisively.

"It's enough." His smug expression had spread over his face and he took another step closer to her.

"Enough for what?" she asked hesitantly. Why was she even having this conversation with him? Because she wanted to. Plain and simple. She wanted to... interact with him, even if it was arguing. And, oh Godric... he *knew*.

"Enough to fuck me again."

"You're repulsive."

"Didn't stop you before," Draco countered. 'And don't tell me you didn't miss me, Granger... I heard you.' Hermione felt an uncomfortable rush of heat in her cheeks. "And as much as I love the idea of you fingering yourself to the thought of me—"

"You... You spied on me?" she gasped.

"Well you didn't really try and hide it," Draco grinned.

Hermione felt humiliation burn in her. "Malfoy, that is not okay! You can't... that's violating my privacy! You..." She was at a loss for words. He had followed her into the baths and watched her as she... Hermione buried her face in her hands. She had never been more embarrassed.

"Don't be embarrassed. It was one of the hottest things I've ever seen."

She didn't want to feel like this. The embarrassment was bad enough, but the fact that a small part of her was... ugh, *turned on* by this too was too much, too confusing. She should be furious with him, she *was* furious with him. So then why did she have this bubbling lightness in her again?

Malfoy's lips tugged in a crooked grin. "You're cute when you're mad."

"Well you must find me adorable then because I'm always mad at you," she said quickly, trying to scowl at him.

The crooked grin spread a little wider. "Fucking adorable, actually." He took a step towards her and Hermione felt the air shift between them. "My little Mud—"

Her hand was flying up toward him, yearning to connect with his cheek before she even thought through the action. But Malfoy wasn't drunk this time and his Seeker skills were as sharp as ever. He grabbed her wrist and held it inches from his face. Then he brought his own hand up to mirror it next to hers. She pulled a little, but his grip was strong. He pushed back her hair over her shoulder and then brushed his fingers along her cheek, trailing them over her neck until he got to the neckline of her sweater.

"Don't call me that. I mean it, Malfoy. If we're going to—" she stopped talking as a sly grin began to spread on his face.

"Oh we are, my sweet—" Draco paused and Hermione narrowed her eyes at him. "*Sweetheart*." He said with a strange grin on his face, almost like he was actually enjoying himself. Hermione felt something jump in her, but quickly dismissed it as Malfoy just trying to get to her again.

She exhaled and rolled her eyes, but that was only in hopes to cover the weak fluttering inside her so he wouldn't notice the effect his words had on her and how much she liked hearing him call her Sweetheart.

"I want to see it," he said in a low voice that reverberated all the way down her spine. She let him pull back the neck of her sweater and watched his eyes darken as he sucked in a hurried breath, running his finger over the pale bruise and thin lines of his bite mark.

"Mine..." he murmured.

Hermione jerked away from him but he still had her wrist in his hand. Malfoy pulled her back towards him and spun her around so that her back was pressed into his chest.

"Let me go," she said firmly, or at least thought she did, but when she heard her voice there was a clear waiver in it.

"Let you go?" he asked as if he didn't understand the words. 'All in good time, but I still have some making up to do to you before that.' He buried his face in her hair and breathed in deeply. "Fuck, I've missed you."

Hermione's breath hitched in her chest. Missed her? This was what made him so confusing! There were different Malfoys. There was the mean, rude Malfoy who called her disgusting names and then there was the dark, enticing Draco who... Oh. Oh...

His lips brushed over her neck and he gently kissed a sensitive spot just below her ear, latching his lips onto it and flicking his tongue over it lazily.

There was Malfoy, and then there was... "Draco," she breathed out.

"Yes, pet," Malfoy murmured in her ear. "I missed hearing my name come out of your sweet lips." He snaked one arm around her middle and he released her wrist with the other,

bringing it up to cup her cheek and turn her face towards him lifting his mouth from her neck to take hers. It was a slow kiss, powerful and passionate. Hermione let out a small whimper into his mouth as his tongue ran across her lips, pressing into them to part them.

She was on fire despite the chill March air around them. Her skin tingled as Malfoy, or was it *Draco*, lifted her sweater up and slid his hand under it. His fingers were cold and she gasped at the sensation. That's when he struck. Taking her open mouth and claiming it with his own. The feel of his warm tongue and cold hands were conflicting sensations. Just like the two sides of him. Just like his loathing and his lust. Draco Malfoy was two men in one body.

He grabbed her breast and kneaded it in his hand, groaning a little into her mouth as he pushed her face even more towards his own. Hermione reached up her hand and placed it on his neck gently before moving it up to knot her fingers into his hair, making him moan again into her mouth. He squeezed her breast and pulled at the cup of her bra, trying to get more of her flesh against his.

He reached down into it and found her nipple, rolling it in his fingers and sucked in a breath through his nose. Hermione leaned back into him, feeling his strong chest behind her and giving into the reaction he was causing in her body. Malfoy hated her, Draco wanted her. And she wanted this.

If Ron had wanted to be with her then he would have been. He was with Lavender and she had to accept that. Just like she had to accept the fact that no one, no one, had ever made her feel what Draco was making her feel right now. It was wrong and she might regret it later, but now, she wanted it and for once, she was going to do something for herself.

Hermione pulled at his hand through her sweater and tugged it down. Malfoy hesitated for a moment then resumed his movements against her mouth and dropped his hand to the top of her jeans.

"Ask me," he breathed out against her lips.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"Ask me for it. I want to hear you say you want me." Malfoy's voice was deep and rough. It was just what he needed, she reminded herself. It wasn't... *real*, just words. All the worry, the stress, the strain over the past week of Ron in the hospital wing and struggling with rebuilding their friendship had made her head hurt. But Malfoy could make her feel good. More than good; he could make her feel incredible. Feel things that no one else ever had.

"Please," Hermione whispered against his lips. "Please, Draco, touch me." She placed her hand over his and slid it down to the button on her jeans.

Malfoy groaned deeply as he kissed her again. He ripped open her jeans and his hand slithered down into them. His ring caught for a moment on the band of her knickers, but he shoved it a little harder and it slid inside to cup her.

"Oh Granger," Draco groaned against her lips. 'You're so warm.' His hand was cool against her and Hermione tensed a little at the sudden sensation of cold against such a sensitive place. "So soft," he murmured as he rubbed his hand over her. "And so wet already." She felt him grin against her lips as he slid his fingers inside her fold.

“Draco,” she breathed out and was rewarded with the cool pad of his fingers on her clit. She let out a high-pitched moan and Draco returned it with a low groaning growl.

He pulled her back a few steps until his back was against one of the wooden beams holding up the stands and he pressed her firmly against him. He was hard and he ground his hips into hers until his erection found itself pressed right in between her cheeks. Hermione moved her hips a little and his fingers passed over her again.

“Oh fuck, yes, Granger,” Draco groaned. “Do that again.”

Hermione repeated the movement and she felt Draco’s cock press into her.

He lifted his lips from hers and pressed them to her ear. “I’m going to put my fingers inside you and then I want you to fuck yourself on them.”

Hermione felt a flush of heat rise up in her, reddening her cheeks at his dirty words. He moved his hand lower and she felt as he dipped two fingers inside her.

“But...” Hermione said softly.

“What? What is it, pet?” Draco murmured into her hair, breathing in deeply. “What does my sexy little kitten want?”

Another rush of heat. Hermione had never been called sexy before, but if there was ever a time she felt it, it was now with Draco’s hand buried in between her legs.

“I want you to touch me,” she squirmed a little. “Where you were.”

He chuckled deeply and let the hand that was holding her face expand over the side of her neck. “You’ve got to be a good little girl and grind on my dick first, then I’ll give you what you want.” He bit down softly on her ear lobe and pushed his fingers back into her. “Now fuck me.”

Hermione bit her lip as Draco latched his lips back onto the spot under her ear and slipped his other hand down her neck and into the top of her sweater. She rolled her hips back like she did before and pushed herself against his erection a few times, simultaneously rocking herself on his fingers. She had missed this. She had missed this feeling of complete abandon; giving herself over to the pleasure that only Malfoy provided.

Hermione kept at it, rocking her hips against his cock and his fingers. His other hand snaked down her sweater and into one of the cups of her bra, grasping her breast in his hand and massaging it, pulling at the nipple between two of his fingers.

She moaned, leaning her head back and giving him more of her neck to his mouth.

“Mmm, Granger,” Draco moaned in her ear. “Fuck, you make me so fucking hard. You’re so hot and your ass feels so good grinding on my dick. More, pet, more.”

Hermione moved faster, grinding her hips against him as he squeezed her body tighter in his arms. Having Draco tell her what to do, what he wanted, let her give over into her inhibitions. She never wanted him to let go. It just felt too good. Too good to stop. And she wasn’t going to. It was wrong, but she wasn’t going to stop letting her body have what it needed. And what it needed was him.

“Are you going to be my good little girl from now on?” Malfoy’s voice was thick in her ear and his breath was hot against her skin.

“Yes,” she nodded. “Yes.”

He groaned and she shivered at the sound. “Good girl. And good girls get rewarded.” He grazed his thumb over her clit and her body jumped at the feeling. Draco pushed her back against him and held her there, letting out a low laugh in her ear. “Yes, that’s it, right there, kitten.”

He dropped his mouth back to her neck, kissing and sucking on the skin as she ground herself harder into him, sliding his fingers into herself and against the sensitive bundle of nerves aching for him.

The roar of the crowd and the sound of the game faded from her ears and was replaced by the soft sounds of Draco’s mouth on her and their heavy breaths. She was doing her best to be quiet, but although her moans were coming out as low whimpers, there was a steady stream of them that she could not quell.

“Shh,” Malfoy cooed. “I know it feels good. It feels good for me too, but you’ve got to be quiet. Can you do that? Can you do that for me?”

Hermione whimpered and felt his thumb pass over her clit again as his fingers slid deeply into her. “N-n-no,” she moaned.

Draco laughed again and shifted his arm, pulling it out of her shirt and pulling her head to the other side, pushing her hair out of the way as he lowered his lips to this newly exposed side of her neck and placed his hand over her mouth.

“Okay, now you can moan all you want.” She felt him smirk into her skin but didn’t care, she did just that and let out the moan she had been holding back into his hand.

“God, that’s a beautiful sound,” he whispered. ‘Mmm, I can’t wait to be inside you. I’m going to fuck you so hard that you won’t be able to breathe.’ His voice was low and hoarse and she felt him begin to thrust his hips back into her. “And you won’t care. You’ll give it up for what I give to you. The only one who has ever touched you,” he growled and thrust his hips harder into her.

Hermione clenched around his fingers. His words were driving her over the edge. Her legs were weakening under her and she was leaning heavier and heavier into him, letting him hold her up in his strong arms and he pumped his fingers in and out of her quickly.

“Because no one else will *ever* make you feel as good as I do. You know that, don’t you, kitten?” His breathing was getting rapid and he was moving faster against her. Hermione met him movement for movement and felt the stirrings of her orgasm deep inside.

“I’m sorry I said those things to you because you’re not a Mudblood whore.” Hermione faltered for a moment, thrown off by his admission, but Malfoy drove on, unrelenting as they moved together. “You’re *my* whore.”

Hermione cried out into his hand as her legs gave out under her with the onset of her orgasm.

Draco growled with each thrust against her and closed his lips over the same place he had bitten her before sharply drawing breath and his hips moved frantically against her as he rubbed her clit quickly, extending her pleasure until her vision blurred and began to fade.

She collapsed against him, her head falling back on his shoulder as he breathed heavily, his face buried in her hair. He dropped his hand from her mouth and Hermione eagerly took advantage by gulping down large amounts of the chill March air. They rested there for a few long moments, gathering themselves after coming apart together.

Slowly Malfoy pulled his hand from her jeans and Hermione turned to face him. She wasn't sure what had just happened between them, but knew for certain that something had. The look in Draco's eyes confirmed it.

He brought his fingers up to his mouth and stuck them in, sucking on them before grinning. "Sweet."

Hermione blushed and dropped her eyes. She fastened her jeans back and was straightening her sweater when the same two finger landed under her chin and tilted her face up to his.

"I'm sorry, okay?" he said and his grey eyes shone like silver. "I know I say... things, but you've to understand that... there's things that..." His eyes darkened as he tried to explain.

"I know," Hermione said, cutting him off. Something, maybe the fact that he actually just apologized, or at least tried to, made her understand what he was trying to say.

Something passed behind his eyes but slithered away too quickly for Hermione to recognize it. He blinked and then smirked at her.

"Next time, I'm going to fuck that sweet little cunt of yours until you're screaming my name."

Hermione's heart fluttered in her chest. "I know," she repeated. "I know, Draco."

14. fourteen

Chapter 14

Draco's hands shook. What was happening to him? What was she doing to him? She was like the bloody sun, streaming light down onto him with no remorse, no respite. He could try and forget she was there, but like the sun, she shone so brightly he couldn't help but see her, feel her, long for her.

He needed a drink. No, he needed her again. When she was in his arms he was able to hold onto her, hold onto something and stop his spinning out into the cold void of space. She pulled him in like gravity and he just couldn't stay away. One taste of Granger was better than a whole barrel of fire whisky.

Fuck, he wanted her so bad. If he could have her right now he'd press her against the closest surface and bury himself in her, losing himself in her warmth, her heat, her brilliance. He'd fuck her, over and over, until everything else burned away, everything but her.

But he was here, staring at the Vanishing Cabinet again and she was off celebrating with all her little Gryffindor friends and pretending she hadn't fucked herself to orgasm on his fingers just a few hours ago. Sweet Salazar thinking about her little moans was *killing him*. He felt himself twitch in his trousers and sighed, running his hand down his face.

At least he had her back. She'd let him in again and he wasn't going to fuck it up this time and risk her running off again. The Mudblood was his. No, he shouldn't call her that, not even in his own head, least it slip out by accident while he was shoving himself inside her sweet—

What was he *doing?! Letting a filthy Mudblood like that get into his head and make him think... think she was worth something*. No, all Granger was good for was a hard fuck and a good suck and that was that. So why had he apologized? He already had her where he wanted her, back in his control when he had looked into her big doe eyes and suddenly felt a pang of guilt run through him.

She didn't trust him and she shouldn't trust him because he was Death Eater plotting to kill Albus Dumbledore and using her to get his rocks off in the meantime. She'd be dumb to trust him and Granger was the smartest person he knew.

Fuck! No! She wasn't smart and she wasn't a *person*. She was a Mudblood.

His stomach churned sickly as he forced the thought down his own throat. He headed down the stairs, through the castle and was probably going to end up sitting on his bed, staring up at the canopy and replaying their earlier encounter over and over in his mind. Maybe leaving out the part where he broke down and apologized. Or... maybe not, because she had blinked her big eyes wide and looked almost excited at the prospect of screaming for him. Draco's stomach flipped over a few times, the sick feeling fading as excitement coursed through him.

Shit, when was the last time he had a real meal? He had slept through breakfast this morning and had doubled back from the Quidditch pitch with Crabbe and Goyle in some random girls' bodies and planned on grabbing a quick lunch before heading off to work on the Vanishing Cabinet when he had seen Granger on her own and changed his mind, chasing after her. And yesterday... fuck, he couldn't even remember the day before.

How much was he drinking these days? Blaise had mentioned it a couple of times, but he had brushed it off. Maybe he should listen to his... *friend* and cut back a little. Maybe now that Granger was around again he wouldn't have to drink so much. He could use her instead. That was an interesting thought— Granger. At his beck and call. Mmm.

And then he heard her. Laughing loudly with the Weaselette and Loony Lovegood. She looked radiant, smiling like that; her cinnamon eyes sparkling and her caramel curls bouncing with her quick steps and... Oh shit. She was headed his way.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He couldn't deal with her right now. Not with all these messy feelings floating around in him and her with her friends around her and... Draco swallowed. She had discarded her sweater and chosen to wear a t-shirt instead. It did not hide her like the frumpy sweaters she normally wore did and he could see the round curve of her tits, the slope of her sides stretching down to her waist where her jeans hugged. Jeans he had slid his hand into...

It was too much. Draco ducked into the first open door he could find. It was a bathroom and a girl's one from what he could tell. He didn't care, it was empty anyways and he just needed a place to get away from her or else he was going to grab her again and haul her in here and make good on his promise to fuck her until she was screaming.

"What are *you* doing in here?" A high, nasally voice asked from behind him and Draco spun around. He found himself looking into a pale, translucent face with thick-rimmed glasses perched on top of a snarky expression.

"Shit!" Draco stumbled back, hitting the sink behind him.

"You're a *boy*," she sneered and floated a little closer to him. "You don't belong in here."

"Neither do you. Aren't you supposed to be in a grave somewhere?" He tried to collect himself. No matter how many he encountered, Draco still felt strangely uneasy around ghosts. Death in general, freaked him out a little and they were an unnatural reminder of it, floating around like pale shadows.

The ghost girl pulled back a little, hurt clear on her face before it twisted back into its original expression. "Scared of a little ghost? Or is it *me* who is making you nervous?" She flashed him a cheeky grin.

"I like my girls warm," he snapped and was pleased that this seemed to shut her up. Granger had been so warm, her skin burning under his fingers, his body leaning into his, pouring heat into him...

"This is *my* bathroom. What are you doing in here?"

"None of your fucking business," he snarled.

She rolled her eyes a little. "You chose the right place then. No one comes in here." She pouted and kicked her foot out into the air.

He heard an echo of Granger's laughter and for a moment was seized with terror at the thought that she might come in here, but Ghostie was right and it passed by, faintly fading into nothing.

Draco leaned back against the sink and rubbed his eyes until he saw new colors. The porcelain of the sink was cool against him. "Good."

He could feel her watching him; her cold dead eyes sending chills down his spine. But if this was somewhere he could come and be alone, then he would learn to tolerate Ghostie.

"Are you hiding from someone?"

"No."

"Looks like you're hiding from someone."

Draco narrowed his eyes at her and she smirked at him, shaking her head a little and making her pigtails wag on either side of her head.

"Is someone bullying you?"

"No."

"People used to bully me. Called me names and made fun of my glasses."

Draco eyed her. "They weren't wrong."

She let out a long wail and dove into the sink next to him, causing water to spew out of the faucet right onto him.

"Shit!" Draco jumped up, his shirt was soaked and clinging tightly to him. Grumbling he reached for his wand and then froze. Wet, his shirt was almost see-through and there, on his arm, was his mark showing through the thin white fabric. He pulled out his wand and shot a scorching wave of hot air over it, trying to dry the shirt.

It burned. The mark ached under the heat, sending deep shards of pain into his arm. Draco balled his hand up into a fist and kept at it until his sleeve was dry.

"Fuck," Draco groaned and saw that his fist had turned red.

"Oh, don't be such a baby." Ghostie was back. Hovering a few feet away and had her head tilted to the side. She might have been dead, but Draco knew that expression well. Ghostie was checking him out.

He waved the wand over the rest of him until his shirt was only damp instead of drenched. "I'm not being a baby, you're being a bitch."

She gasped in surprise and behind her glasses her eyes welled up with tears. "Well you deserved it!" She stamped her foot into the air. "No matter you're hiding from someone in here! They probably all *hate you!*"

Draco was taken aback. She wasn't entirely wrong. Blaise had gotten annoyed with his drinking, Crabbe and Goyle were always complaining about having to take Polyjuice for him,

and Pansy only got Theo's dick out of her mouth long enough to tell him to fuck off. But... Granger didn't hate him, at least, not anymore.

He glanced down at his arm where the dark was safely hidden under the dry sleeve. One day she would though. And that thought bothered him more than he liked.

"Well I hate them too," Draco sneered at her. "People suck. Especially girls."

Her pale face suddenly split into a wide smile. "You're hiding from a girl?"

"I'm not hiding from a—"

"Is she your girlfriend?"

"She is *not* my—"

"So that's why you're hiding from her."

"I told you, I'm not—"

"If you're *not* hiding from your *not* girlfriend," Ghostie smiled knowingly at him. "Then what are you doing here?"

Draco stared at her for a few moments and finally sighed. "I'm not hiding from my not girlfriend."

She slid into the sink next to him as Draco leaned back and pretended to be interested in the water slowly creeping along the floor.

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

He made a face of confusion and offense, hoping it would upset her again and she'd leave him alone. "Why should I? I don't even know you."

Ghostie smiled again. "Because you obviously don't have anyone else to talk to," she said simply. "And by the way, my name is Myrtle."

"Poison me again." Ron collapsed into the chair next to her. "Give me another week in the hospital wing because this workload is unbearable! Honestly, Hermione, I don't know how you manage."

Hermione smiled as Ron hung his head in his hands, freckled fingers running through his copper colored hair.

"I manage," Hermione started, trying to hide the amusement in her voice. "By proper planning, scheduling, and time management, Ronald."

"Yeah, well I like actually having a life," Ron quipped then glanced quickly at her. "I didn't mean—"

"It's okay," Hermione said and picked up her quill again, trying to act normal. They had always had banter and playfully teased each other and now that they were friends again, they could still go back to that, right?

“What are you working on?” Ron asked and leaned over towards her, peering down at her work.

“Arithmancy.”

“Yuck.” Ron scrunched up his nose and Hermione laughed. His smile was warm. She had almost forgotten how his blue eyes twinkled when he smiled like that.

Lavender cleared her throat and the spell of the moment between them was broken. She was standing a little ways off, her hands on her hips and was tapping her foot expectantly. Her icy eyes moved from Ron to Hermione, glaring daggers at the two of them.

Ron pulled back. “Well, have fun with that.” He sounded strangely disappointed. “I’ll, uh, see you tomorrow?” he asked, as if he was making sure that she was still going to speak to him in the morning.

“Yeah,” Hermione bit her lip. “I should... head to the Library and finish this up.”

“You don’t...” Ron seemed to be trying to find the right words. “You don’t have to go.” He glanced up to Lavender for a moment before bringing his eyes back down to Hermione.

“It’s fine.” She closed her book and rolled her up parchment. Ron hesitated as she packed her bag and stood up. “Really, it’s fine. We’re fine,” she said in a soft voice.

Ron gave her a half smile and then walked over to Lavender who promptly grabbed his hand and hauled him off to their usual corner, talking in an angry whisper too low for Hermione to hear.

Hermione closed her eyes for a moment and swallowed. They were friends again. For weeks, that is what she had hoped for and now it was happening. It would be foolish of her to get her hopes up and wish for more. Just because he was back in her life did not mean he necessarily wanted a new role in it as well. And did she want that too? She had spent weeks working on getting over Ron and she had made decent progress too. There were still many things she was upset with him over, but she was trying to move past them so they could be friends again. She didn’t know how or what she felt for him exactly, but she did know that she kept thinking about the way Malfoy had opened up and actually apologized to her. Not to mention his promise of what their next time would be like.

After all, if she went to the Library she might just happen to run into Malfoy...

She was about to pack up and head to the Library when she saw Ginny walking quickly towards the staircase leading up to the girls dormitories, wiping her eyes. Hermione pushed her conflicting feelings aside and followed Ginny up the stairs and to her dorm room. She had thrown herself on her bed, red hair spilling down her back.

“What’s happened?” Hermione asked quickly.

Ginny pushed herself up, hugging her pillow. “Dean and I had a fight,” she muttered.

“Ginny...” Hermione sat down on the side of her bed.

“I’m fine,” Ginny sniffed. “I shouldn’t be crying. I don’t know why I am. I’m just... so *angry* at him!” she said tearfully. Hermione sat quietly, letting her presence comfort her friends in ways that words could not. “He can be such a dick sometimes!”

Ginny told her about Dean laughing at Harry after he had gotten hit by the Bludger at the Quidditch match. Hermione had emerged from under the stands just in time to see Cormac accidentally lob the wicked ball straight at Harry and she had screamed as she watched him fall from his broom, barely caught by his teammates before hitting the ground.

Ginny complained about her relationship for a little while longer and then started complaining about Cormac.

“He better be glad I didn’t take one of the beater’s bats to his head after that match! I almost wish whoever had broken his hand had done more of a job on it and maybe he would have been out of this match as well!”

Hermione blanched. She had almost forgotten about that. How had she forgotten about that?! Malfoy had beat Cormac and broken his hand and she had just let herself ignore that fact. And the fact that he had never really owned up to it either. She felt the guilty weight of a stone hitting her stomach. Malfoy was dangerous and she was playing with fire every time she went back to him. But his touch was cool and calming and quieted her mind in a way nothing else did.

She didn’t want to feel like this, but at the same time, she didn’t want to stop.

Hermione spent the rest of the week doing her homework along with Harry and Ron’s. A return of Ron being her friend also meant a return of her proofreading and editing all their essays before they turned them in. Most of the time she didn’t mind and it was easy enough, but tonight she was having a hard time focusing on Herbology. She shifted in her seat, a strange pressure weighing down inside her, settling uncomfortably between her legs.

She had thought that Malfoy would have sought her out by now, but in a strange turn of events he was actually keeping his distance from her. At first she was nervous that maybe he had finally gotten tired of her, like he did with all the other girls, but her over active brain had chimed in reminding her that he had gone out of his way to give her a real apology and that wasn’t something he would do without expecting something of equal or greater value in return.

So she decided he must have been biding his time.

She had snuck a couple of glances at him during classes and in the corridors and she had to say, Malfoy was not looking well. The bags under his eyes had darkened to a tired shade of purple and his pale skin had a sallow tint to it. When McGonagall had kept him after class to reprimand him for missing another assignment his grey eyes had been vacant and he simply stood there until she was done and had awarded him with another night of detention.

When he missed a full day of classes again, she went looking for him. She started on the seventh floor landing where she knew he had been hanging out. It was hard to believe that Harry’s obsession with Malfoy had extended so far that he set Kreacher and Dobby to follow him. As they told her, Ron, and Harry all about Malfoy hanging out in the Room of Requirement, she couldn’t help but be eternally grateful that nothing had happened between them this week.

She would have to be more careful.

Half an hour later and Hermione was checking the Library. She went to the Restricted Section first, but didn't see him anywhere. It was late and most aisles in the main portion were empty. However, there was one study table in the very back of the Library that she had seen him at before.

She walked softly as she made her way back there and... yes. There he was. Sitting at a large solid wood table, tucked far away from anyone, Malfoy was sitting quietly and reading a book. It was strange to see him doing something so mundane and she found her mouth turning up in a smile at the sight of him. Hermione paused, remembering the last time she found him hiding out in the library, but he wasn't drinking this time and he didn't look angry. In fact, he mostly just looked tired.

She plucked up her Gryffindor courage and approached him.

"Are you actually reading in here?" Hermione asked, a smile playing on her lips.

Draco did not look up from his book. "That is what a Library is for, Granger."

Hermione sat down in the chair next to him. "I was wondering how long it would take you to realize there were books in here."

"Well you can be a little distracting." Draco glanced over at her with a sneer, but she caught the mischievous glint in his eye and felt a small thrill pass through her.

She felt emboldened by the small gleam and pushed forward. "You seemed to be able to ignore me well enough this week." Hermione leaned in close, whispering, "I almost had to make another trip to the prefect's bathroom."

Draco looked almost... impressed. She straightened up and gave him her best innocent smile and blinked her big eyes. Draco cocked an eyebrow up and she saw the corner of his mouth tug with a smirk. "Well, well, well," he closed his book. "Looks like kitten has finally come out to play."

She felt that same pressure between her legs again and leaned forward, breathing out as she said, "I've been waiting for you."

Draco twirled a thick curl around his finger. "And what exactly have you been waiting on?"

Her heart was pounding in her chest and her hands shook a little with excitement. She reached one out and placed it on his thigh. "I believe there was a promise to fuck me until I was screaming your name?" Her mouth was dry and she was surprised by her own boldness, but Malfoy had unleashed something in her she didn't want to cage back up. And she had missed him. This. She had missed this. Not him. Well, maybe a little.

His pupils expanded and she noticed he had gone impossibly still. She could practically see thoughts moving in the blacks of his eyes, but his face gave no indication as to what those thoughts were. And she wanted to. She wanted to hear all the dirty things she knew he was thinking of doing to her right now.

"But if you're too busy for me then maybe I'll have to get a replacement—"

Malfoy had a fistful of her hair and had yanked her forward until her face was an inch from his. His strength and control were impressive to say the least and Hermione couldn't

help but feel a frisson run deep inside her. His grey eyes were storming and the muscle in his jaw was popping out. Hermione winced a little, but did not struggle. She didn't want to break free. Not from him.

"You even think about replacing me and I'll tie you to my bed and keep you there. You belong to me, *Sweetheart*, don't forget that."

Hermione could feel her heartbeat between her legs. Warmth flooded through her and she opened her mouth, trying to get oxygen back into her blood. Draco's eyes flicked down to it and moved over the curve of her lips. "Remind me," she breathed out.

His eyes cut back up to hers and she saw the deep, dark possessive passion she loved so much. He struck like a snake, pulling her by her hair out of her chair and shoving her under the desk. Hermione's shoulder hit the partition under the table, but Malfoy kept his hold on her hair, pulling her in position in between his legs.

"I know I said I was going to fuck that sweet cunt of yours," he brushed his fingers over her cheek. "And I will, but first it looks like I need to teach that smart mouth of yours who it belongs to."

She was panting with excitement as Malfoy undid his trousers and pulled himself out. Even though she had seen it before she was still impressed by his size, not only in length but in girth as well. Maybe she was the slut he called her because the sight of it made her mouth water.

"Now, be a good little whore and swallow my cock." His voice was low and thick like velvet and Hermione didn't think twice about obeying. She lowered her mouth onto him, working a little more of him into her until he was almost fully in her mouth.

Draco was breathing heavily, his hands gripping the edge of the table as he looked down at her with dark grey eyes. She was enjoying herself and let her tongue slide along him as she slowed, wanting to tease him a little, just to see what he would do.

"Don't..." Draco breathed out. "Don't stop."

Hermione fought the smile as she hollowed her cheeks and pulled herself back down his shaft.

"Fuck..." he whispered. "Take it. Fucking take all of it. Do it, whore."

Her lower stomach clenched and she pushed her head farther onto him. She felt him at the back of her throat when someone called his name and Draco's head shot up.

"What are you still doing here?" She recognized the voice as Theodore Nott and he laughed, pulling out a chair opposite of Malfoy.

Malfoy's entire body went stiff and Hermione stopped moving, his dick still in between her lips. The table had a heavy wooden partition underneath it as part of its support and a large solid frame that it rested on which was also hiding her from view. It was a mercy that she would never forget. If they had been caught, there would be no explaining her way out of this one. It's not like anyone would believe that she tripped and fell, open-mouthed onto Malfoy's dick, under a table, in the back of the Library.

"Uh, reading." Malfoy cleared his throat and she heard him opening the book again.

Nott's chair creaked under him and something slid across the table. "*Meticulous Mending for Major and Minor Mistakes?*" Nott read off the title. "What's this for?"

"None of your business," Draco snapped and she heard the crumpling of pages. He must have snatched the book back from Nott.

"Geez, relax, would you? I was just asking," he huffed.

"What do you want, Theo? I'm a little busy."

"Yeah, sure looks like it," Nott said sarcastically.

Hermione swallowed nervously and she felt Malfoy jerk forward. She blinked her eyes in surprise and looked up at him at the same time he risked a glance down at her. Her quick mind conjured up a sordid idea. He would make her pay for it, certainly, but... didn't she want him to?

Hermione fought a smile and flicked her tongue against him. Draco jerked again.

"Are you okay?" Nott asked.

"Fine," Malfoy said hoarsely.

Hermione slowly took him all the way back in her mouth.

"Are you sweating?"

Draco dropped his hand to his lap, trying to push her back but Hermione knocked it away and slid her tongue down his shaft, letting her lips follow after it.

"Fucking hell... Theo, what do you *want*?" he growled angrily.

Hermione moved faster, feeling him tense against her. He was right, she had come out to play.

"I wanted to see if you could get me a couple of bottles of Ogden's, that's all. I don't know how you get them in so fast. My guy takes forever to bring them in."

"What? Yeah. Sure."

He was at the back of her throat again and she wondered how much farther she could push him when he gripped the back of her head and forced it down. He shoved himself past the opening of her throat and she heard him inhale sharply. He held her there, keeping his cock in her throat as he leaned forward onto the table.

"Are you sure you're okay, Draco? You... I don't know. You're acting weird."

"Maybe I just don't like you, you ever think of that?" He snarled.

Hermione squirmed against him, but Malfoy either didn't notice or didn't care. She put her hand on his knee, but Malfoy did not relent.

"Is there anything else? No? Then give me the gold tomorrow."

She heard Nott's chair scrape backwards as he stood up. "You know we used to have a good time. Hanging out, chasing girls. You're never around anymore, Draco. What are you up to these days?"

Hermione was running out of air. Her throat hurt from the head of his cock stretching it and she knew she couldn't keep doing this for much longer. She did the only thing she could think of and lapped her tongue against him rapidly, trying to get his attention.

"Theo, I swear on Salazar's watery grave if you don't fuck off right now I'm going to curse you."

"Fuck you, Draco."

"Your girlfriend already did."

Hermione nearly choked in surprise.

"You fucking bastard." Nott sounded upset and she looked up to see Malfoy smirking cruelly at him. She knew that he wasn't fooling around with Pansy anymore, but she still didn't like the reminder that he had other girls in the same position she was in now. Well, maybe not exactly the same, but still.

Draco's hand tightened on the back of her head and she heard Nott's footsteps as he stormed off.

Malfoy pulled her head back and Hermione heaved down a heavy breath, filling her lungs with the air they had been denied.

"What the fuck was that?" Malfoy hissed down at her.

Hermione coughed a few times and glared up at him. "I could ask you the same thing!"

"What? You didn't grab my ankle."

Hermione opened her mouth to argue then remembered what he had told her the last time she had got on her knees for him.

"Rules. You'd do well to remember them." He pushed his chair back and pulled her up to a standing position with him. "I remember yours, *Sweetheart*."

She stared up at him and watched him smirk at her, but with none of the cruelty he had before though. He had replaced Mudblood with Sweetheart. Two sides of the same coin just like Malfoy and Draco. Maybe Malfoy had run through girls, but Draco was only with her. Not *with*, just... this.

"You could have choked me," she tried to argue.

"Would you like that?" He smirked down at her. His hand moved lightly over her neck. 'Feel my hand around your neck when I'm fucking you. Only let you breathe once you've pleased me?' Her blood was hot. Too hot. Burning her from the inside out. Malfoy leaned in close to her until she was breathing in the air he was breathing out. "But not tonight. Tonight I want to hear every one of your screams."

She was melting. The heat in her blood was melting her bones, turning her into a messy puddle. Malfoy pushed her back onto the table, his hands already on her thighs, moving up under her skirt.

Sparks went off in her mind and she suddenly remembered Harry talking about how he checked the Marauders' Map every night before bed and Hermione sat up. Malfoy made to

push her back down, but she slammed her hands into his chest.

“What? What’s wrong?” His hands stopped moving.

“Not here,” Hermione said, biting her lip.

Malfoy smirked at her. “I’ve wanted to take you on a Library table for years. If you think ___”

“Do it in the Room or Requirement then,” Hermione said quickly. “You can’t make me scream in here, but there... There you can do whatever you want to me.”

That same impassive expression and calculating eyes bore down on her and Hermione just prayed that Malfoy wouldn’t shove her back down again. There was no way she could tell him that Harry was watching him on the Map, but she also couldn’t risk Harry seeing her with him and the Room of Requirement didn’t show up on the Map. Malfoy’s hands slid down her body. She only had a strand of restraint left, one more touch from him and she would lose it.

“You filthy whore.” He grinned down at her.

Hermione’s heart fluttered. “Only for you.”

Malfoy grabbed her and had her halfway down the aisle and out of the Library before she found her footing enough to keep up with him. She tripped on the second flight of stairs he was dragging her up and instead of waiting for her, Malfoy grabbed her around the waist and threw her over his shoulder, carrying her the rest of the way.

Three quick turns and she heard him open what sounded like a large door. Malfoy slapped her ass and pulled her down from his shoulder, throwing her onto a table face first. He didn’t waste any time, pushing her skirt up and ripping her knickers down. She barely had time to glance around at a miniature replica of the Hogwarts Library before she felt him plunge inside her.

She didn’t hold back the moan that slid up her sore throat and echoed around them. She knew he was going to make her pay for teasing him under the table and even for the comment she had made earlier, but she was still not prepared for his full length inside her all at once.

“Oh, God, Granger,” Malfoy groaned. “It’s so good. Your pussy is so good. Fuck!”

Hermione was drowning in desire. She had been fighting her arousal for days and sucking his dick only enticed her further. She heard her sharp breaths and pitiful moans echo around them, filling the faux Library with sounds of her ecstasy.

He railed himself into her and her moans moved up a few octaves, growing louder, faster, higher as her whole body responded to the feeling of him filling her completely. Malfoy’s fingers dug into her hips painfully and he slammed himself against her at a punishing pace.

“You think you can replace me? Huh? No one else—” he grunted. “No one else can make you feel like I do. Say it. Say it, whore.”

“No—” Hermione gasped. “No one else!”

“Fucking right.” He smacked her ass and thrust into her again. “You’ll never fucking replace me. Never. You’re *my* slut. *My* whore. *My Granger.*”

Her breath caught in her throat. *My Granger*. It sounded almost too endearing, too... intimate.

"I'm the one that makes you wet. I'm the one that fucks this pussy. Only me." He either didn't think there was anything wrong with calling her 'my Granger' or he hadn't realized he had done it and after three more fucks all the thoughts fell out of her head too. Maybe he was dangerous and maybe she was playing a deadly game with him, but it just felt too good to stop.

"Don't stop," Hermione panted. "Please... more..."

Malfoy leaned down and pulled her up against him. "Oh I'm not going to stop. Not until I'm finished with you. You're mine, Granger," he whispered darkly into her ear. "Now scream for me."

He slammed himself all the way in her and Hermione's tender throat rippled as a loud scream tore from it.

"Fuck yes!" Malfoy shouted from behind her, angling himself deep into her.

She sucked in a dry breath only to have to return back as she cried out again and again. Malfoy was pounding into her incessantly. It hurt. She liked it. No, she loved it.

He pressed his open hand down in between her shoulder blades, holding her down as he crashed his hips into her, driving himself deep inside. Hermione was writhing, twisting and screaming as she felt something roar with pleasure deep inside her and her whole body began to shake uncontrollably.

"You want to replace me?" Malfoy shouted from behind her, pressing his hand heavily down on her. "Huh? Answer me!" He ripped himself from her and Hermione screamed out at the ruined feeling.

"No, no no," she moaned, pressing her hips back into him, trying to get back at the relief she had just been so close to.

"No what?" Malfoy snarled, smacking her ass again.

"No I won't replace you," she cried and her muscles convulsed. "Please! Please, Draco, fuck me fuck me fuck me..." she whimpered.

"Now *that's* what I like to hear." He slid his cock against her a few times, coating himself with her wetness. "My dirty whore begging for my cock. God you're filthy. I fucking love it. I love—"

He shoved himself back inside her and groaned.

Hermione made a few urgent, weak noises as he moved inside her again, sparking up the remnants of the ruined orgasm he had taken from her.

"You're going to be a good girl now, aren't you?" His voice was like silk, soothing her smoothly as he slid in and out.

"Yes," she whimpered. "Yes sir."

Draco missed a beat. "Oh, *fucking hell*."

She could do little else than try and absorb the force of his furious thrusts in and out of her. Draco was grunting, heaving in breaths and Hermione's body took over, pushing back against him, trying to create more friction. The pleasure burned brighter inside her, bringing her back to the edge again.

She had no idea how Malfoy was still holding on, still ramming into her with such force because she was shaking and trying to stay in one piece as he split her apart.

"You want to come? You want to come you dirty fucking slut?!" Malfoy growled.

"Please!" Hermione begged. "Yes I want to come. Please... Please Draco!" she screamed out and he delivered.

"Who's making you come? Who's the only one to make you come?" His deep voice echoed around them.

"You!" Hermione gasped. She knew what he wanted and she would gladly give it to him. "You, Draco! Oh God, *Draco!*"

Her orgasm rippled through her, causing her to convulse against the table. Malfoy held her down and kept the same pace until her screams died out. She felt numb. Like she was touching everything through gloves when Malfoy pulled her back off of the table and pushed her down in front of him.

"Open your fucking mouth."

He filled her mouth, tilting her head back and sliding down her throat before releasing himself with a deep groan.

Hermione swallowed, drinking it down and feeling every bit the awful, wonderful names he called her.

Once he was done he pulled himself from her mouth and tilted her face up to his. Even with the dark circles under his eyes and the gleam of sweat on his skin, Draco still looked like a marble statue come to life.

"Fuck, you're beautiful," he murmured as he brushed his thumb over her lips.

Hermione blinked and tried to look down but Malfoy turned her face back up to his. "If you weren't a—" He stopped and the hazy look in his eyes dissipated.

Hermione wasn't breathing. What was he about to say? And why was she excited to hear it?

"You did good, Granger." Malfoy smirked down at her and lifted her to her feet.

Hermione looked down at herself. Her shirt was torn, her skirt was deeply wrinkled and she could feel her own wetness on her thighs. She could only imagine what her hair must look like at this point and started to pull her fingers through it, trying to unknot the rebellious curls.

"Don't," Malfoy said and Hermione looked up at him. He twisted a loose curl around his finger and tugged at it. "I like how you look freshly fucked."

Hermione would have blushed if her cheeks hadn't already been red from their exertions. She dropped her eyes and chewed on her lip instead.

Draco tilted his head to the side slightly. "How do you do that?"

Hermione looked back up at him, his dark grey eyes deep. "Do what?"

"Look so... innocent when you're anything but. God, Granger, I've fucked you like a whore and you still have this whole.... good girl virginal blush thing that..." He let out a low breath. "It drives me wild."

"You, uhm," Hermione couldn't meet his eyes. "You look pretty good too."

Malfoy rolled his eyes. "I thought you Gryffindors would know how to give a compliment."

At first she felt offended that he was boiling her down to a stereotype again, but then she saw the playful grin on his face. She shook her tangled hair back and raised her chin, accepting his challenge. "Okay, fine. I used to watch you during Quidditch games instead of Harry because seeing you in those green robes—"

Malfoy grabbed her arms and pulled her against him. His mouth was on hers, lips moving and tongue pressing into her, trying to snake it's way into her mouth. She opened it gratefully and let him in. He kissed her with an urgent pressure and Hermione could taste his mint flooding her mouth. He moved his hands down to her hips, landing on the same place where he had gripped her earlier. She felt the bruises flare to life and leaned into him.

He pulled back but left this face close to hers so that she could feel his breath on her face. "You watched me instead of Potter?"

Hermione nodded and his fingers dug in a little more. She winced this time and Malfoy pulled back.

"What is it?"

"Nothing, just... I'll have some bruises from where you grabbed me earlier."

Malfoy removed his hands from her and she frowned. She didn't want him to.

"Are you... okay?"

Hermione almost laughed at his uncertain tone.

"Granger, listen to me. I know I told you I need certain things. One of those things is I need you to tell me if I'm going too far." She looked up into his dark grey eyes and he looked... sincere. "Like when I bit you and tonight when I held you down on me."

"I know. I forgot about the ankle thing."

Malfoy nodded. "Don't forget next time."

"I won't."

"Good girl." His eyes gleamed and he grinned wickedly.

"You won't be mad if I tell you to stop?"

"When has pissing me off ever stopped you from doing anything?"

Hermione smiled. "Maybe I just like getting punished."

He breathed out and tugged on a curl. "Dirty girl."

She giggled.

"Mmm," Malfoy licked his lips and put his hands back on her, a little lighter than before. "So tell me, what did you like about watching me play?"

Hermione blushed again and rested her hands on his chest. His Quidditch muscles were still there, but he felt leaner. He had lost weight.

"You look good in green," she mumbled.

"I look good in you."

"Draco!"

He pushed her against the desk. "Want me to make you scream that again?"

"I... I don't think I can—"

"Don't worry, you're safe from the big bad Slytherin. For now."

She liked this, liked him like this. He was being playful and... nice. Draco Malfoy was being nice to her. But any minute he was going to snap at her and ruin it. He would turn cold and cruel and she would feel foolish for indulging him long enough to let him. What was she doing, sitting here in his arms and... flirting with him?!

"I should go," she muttered, pulling away from him a little. Something flashed in his eyes that she would have said was disappointment if she didn't know better.

Hermione began to turn away, but Malfoy grabbed her back and kissed her again. This kiss was different, deeper and Hermione's hands fell back on him, moving up to brush his jawline. He pushed her against the table again and pulled himself against her. Hermione moaned and started to wrap her arms around his neck.

Malfoy pulled back. She was surprised at how much she wanted him to keep going. "You should go," his voice was ragged. "Or I'll keep you here all night and fuck you until you can't walk."

"Is that a threat?"

Malfoy's eyes darkened with lust. "That is most definitely a threat."

He pulled her arms from around him and took her hand, leading her to the door. She desperately wanted to stay, but he was right, she should go before one of them said something they didn't mean. Or worse, something they did.

She turned. "I didn't mind," Hermione started. "Your hands on my hips. I... I didn't mind."

"Goodnight," Malfoy gave her a crooked smile. "Sweetheart."

15. fifteen

Chapter 15

Draco was forcing down a cup of black coffee when his Eagle Owl, Calix, landed on his shoulder. He reached up and took the letter from his slate colored beak and brushed a few fingers over his mottled chest feathers. He recognized his Mother's handwriting on the thick envelope and dread filled him, stirring the bitter coffee in his empty stomach.

"Cal—" He lifted a piece of sausage up and Calix leaned down, hungrily snapping it up. His Mother had given him Calix right before he left for Hogwarts for the first time, saying that he needed his own owl so that he could write to her whenever he wanted. His letters were infrequent these days and he hadn't even bothered bringing Calix back to school with him this term.

The light weight of his owl lifted from his shoulder as Calix took to the sky again, flapping his large wings silently before soaring out of one of the high windows. Draco watched him disappear into the sunlight streaming in. For a moment he was envious of the bird and his easy escape, rising into the sky and leaving everything behind.

Soon he would be doing just that. After he had completed his task he planned on slipping into the Vanishing Cabinet and fleeing from the school. He didn't care about seeing his classmates or not completing his seventh year of school. What would a scroll of parchment saying he graduated matter compared to the eternal vow he had branded on his skin?

He would have glory, be honored beyond all others for ending the Headmaster's life and even though the act itself unsettled him, his ambition slithered through him, lifting its head and flicking its tongue out, tasting the greatness he would soon achieve.

But once he stole away there would be no return and that meant the end to his involvement with Granger. Not only would Dumbledore's death set in motion events sparking the beginning of the war they all knew was coming, but she would hate him for it. And she would hate herself for what she had done with him.

What would she do if she ever found the mark on him? God, having her hands on his chest and her soft skin caressing his face had been like standing in the sun on a summer day. She lit him up from within and he wanted to feel *more*. He wanted to feel her skin against his, her tits brushing against his chest, her hands running down his back, nails digging in.

But it was impossible. There was no way that he could hide the mark; concealment charms didn't work on it and it was in a place that he couldn't exactly cover if he had his shirt off. Still, the dark mark didn't stop him from wanting to strip himself and her down to only their flesh and indulging in his favorite guilty pleasure.

He glanced over at the Gryffindor table and found her tousled toffee head easily. She was sitting with Potter as usual, but also... Weasley. What was he doing over there? They weren't

friends, she had said so herself. Why was he sitting next to her and... *Oh shit.*

Granger was biting her lip, cinnamon eyes burning as she listened to Weasley talk, using his hands way too much making him look like some kind of ape trying to communicate.

No.

No fucking way he was letting that absolute *Weasel* burrow his way back in. He didn't know much about what had happened between them last term, but one day Granger was friends with Weasley and the next she wasn't and she was meeting him late at night in dark corridors. There was a correlation there and Draco had no intention of letting things reset.

She was his Mudblood. No, his... girl. She was a girl.

Granger was a girl. Not a Mudblood, just a girl. And it looked like Weasley had finally figured that out too.

"What did you get, Draco?"

Pansy's voice jolted him out of his dark fantasies of ripping one of Weasley's long arms off and beating his face in with it. He looked down at the letter clutched in his hand. He had crushed it in his fist and he quickly shoved it in his pocket.

"Nothing."

She leaned in and whispered, "Is it from... *him*?"

Draco stared at her incredulously. He had always been so careful, even though he knew Pansy wouldn't care. Seeing the dark mark on him probably turned her on and the way her dark eyes were glittering told him he was right.

"Who the fuck are you talking about, Pansy?" Draco snarled.

She pulled back, surprised at his tone. "I... I don't know," she backtracked.

"You're right. You *don't* know. And you better keep it that way."

Draco shoved himself up. Out of the corner of his eye he caught Granger's tell-tale curls and knew she was watching him, but he didn't look over at her before he stalked out of the Great Hall.

He didn't have a chance to read the letter until that evening and as soon as he had, he wished he hadn't. His father was not well. The Ministry had finally granted his mother permission to visit Azkaban, but only because her husband was doing so poorly. She had sounded worried and urged him to do well this year, for the good of the family. His mother had cleverly disguised her meaning, but he could read between the lines well enough.

He wasn't sure if he could rightly say he *loved* his father, but he certainly loved his mother and her pleading and description of the awful conditions his father was being kept in moved him. As far as his father went, Draco admired him for the success that he had achieved and had tried for years to be worthy of the approval he so desperately desired, yet never obtained.

Killing Dumbledore ought to do the trick.

Yet he had let his father sit in a frozen cell and rot while he was fucking a disgusting Mudblood who... Merlin, he couldn't deal with this; this back and forth, these confusing thoughts and confounding *feelings*. There had been only one reason he returned to Hogwarts this year instead of taking a position as a Death Eater at the Dark Lord's side. His head had been clear when he came back— plan and plot the murder and once he was done, all would be right again. His father would be allowed to come back, his Mother would stop pacing the halls, and he would finally have earned his father's approval and be worthy of the Malfoy name he was born under.

And then Granger had spread her whore legs and fucked it all up for him. He wanted to blame her for all of this. It was easier that way. Blame wizarding society for being so weak that the bottom was falling out from under them. Blame the Blood Traitors for breaking traditions and letting in inferior magical bloodlines. Blame the world for being so fucked up in the first place. But more than anything, blame the pretty little Mudblood who was fucking him up so badly.

What would his father say if he could see him right now? If he knew the way he *really* felt? Knew that Granger had sunk her claws in and Draco was falling prey to her. He rubbed his forehead where a headache was numbingly pulsating. He needed a drink. Right fucking now.

He started down the stairs to his dorm room to grab one of the bottles Borgin had sent him. Draco opened the door to his dormitory and was greeted with the sight of Pansy's tits jumping up as she fucked herself on top of Theo. She was making an awful lot of noise, more than necessary and Draco knew that they were mostly for Theo's benefit.

Pansy turned towards him, a lock of black hair stuck to her lip, and smiled at him. She kept her eyes on him and didn't stop bouncing.

Theo finally noticed him standing there and threw her off of him, slamming her against the bed and trying to cover her up. He glared darkly back at Draco.

Draco rolled his eyes and walked past Theo's bed towards the trunk at the foot of his. "Don't mind me," he rummaged in his trunk. "I got what I came for." He lifted up the bottle of fire whisky and shook it, the amber liquid sloshing inside.

Theo pulled the blankets further around Pansy and himself. "You could have knocked," he said nastily.

"Nothing I haven't fucked before." Draco shrugged and Pansy giggled.

Theo threw her a dark look before turning back. "Not anymore though. So keep your eyes to yourself."

"Theo," Pansy pouted. "Don't be a spoil sport."

"Yeah, Theo," Draco mocked. "Just because she likes licking my balls doesn't mean she won't lick yours if I tell her to."

"Shut your mouth!" Theo shouted. "She won't be licking your *anything* anymore! Pansy's with me now, isn't that right? Pansy? Pansy!"

Pansy was staring at Draco and licked her lips.

And just because he could, Draco winked at her.

He chuckled as he closed the door behind him with Theo's shouts reverberating into the hall. Fucking with Theo made him feel a little better. He pulled the cork out of the bottle and drank deeply. That made him feel better too.

Now, if only he could have Granger licking his balls, that would be—

Draco scowled. No. He needed to focus on repairing the Vanishing Cabinet, not on Granger and her soft tongue. He couldn't waste any more time on her, even though he couldn't stop thinking that his time with her was running out. The letter felt heavy in his pocket and he felt the weight of his responsibilities bearing down on him.

Tucking the bottle into the inside of his robes, Draco made his way to the Room of Requirement. It was going to be a long night.

Hermione began to worry about Malfoy. She had taken some time to sort through everything that had happened the other night and what kept cropping back up was Malfoy's tired expression and lean chest. He had never been bulky, but now the angles of his cheekbones were sharper and he had stopped fixing his hair, letting it rest messily on his forehead.

She was being more careful though and made sure that she only snuck glances at him when Ron and Harry were otherwise occupied. Having Ginny around made it both easier and harder. Harry seemed to be in a better mood when she was with them and would tear himself out of his Potions book to talk to her and Ginny was a good buffer to help her and Ron's shaky friendship get back on track. But it also meant another person she had to watch out for.

But it was Lavender that she was most concerned about. Her blue eyes followed Hermione and she could not ignore their icy glare. It seemed that Lavender blamed Hermione for the sorry state of her relationship with Ron. More than once Hermione walked into her dorm room and had gotten the impression that Lavender and Parvati had just been talking about her. She hadn't worried much about this though, until this morning.

Hermione was bending over, sticking her Charms book back in her bag as the rest of the class filed out when she felt something brush against her backside. Jumping, she spun around and saw Malfoy grinning at her.

Her breath hitched in her throat and she tried to calm her pulse as it pumped quickly, excitement reaching into her fingertips.

"What are you doing?" she whispered harshly.

Malfoy's eyes shone like silver. "Seeing you bent over again... I just couldn't resist."

Heat flushed into her face and she forced herself to take in a large breath. She was about to reply when she noticed Lavender pretending to adjust the strap on her bag and Hermione was seized with anxiety.

Malfoy followed her line of sight and his expression turned cold as he saw Lavender trying to act like she wasn't watching them from the other side of the room.

"I don't care that you're behind, I'm not going to help you with your coursework," Hermione said loud enough for Lavender's eavesdropping to pick up.

"Like you could ever do anything for me," he sneered at her. "And from the looks of it, you don't do anything for *anyone*."

The change in him was so instantaneous that Hermione felt it like a slap to the face. His grey eyes were like iron as he glared at her. No trace of the cheeky tone he had before, Malfoy was as cold as the marble he was carved from.

She glanced over to Lavender, making sure that this display was at least doing its intended job. Lavender ducked her head down and headed quickly out of the room. Hermione hadn't expected her to say stick up for her; it wasn't like they were friends or anything. She couldn't help but think that even when they were fighting, Ron wouldn't have let anyone talk to her like that. Except maybe himself; he had said terrible things about her. Goodness, everything was so complicated now.

She had been so lost in her thoughts that she was surprised when Malfoy grabbed her around the waist and pulled her towards him. "I didn't mean it." Hermione breathed in deeply through her nose, not trusting herself to open her mouth right now. "You know that, right?"

He leaned down, searching her face. She nodded, not meeting his eyes.

"Don't worry, Brown bought it." He leaned her into the desk behind her.

"Malfoy," Hermione sighed. "Not now." Hearing Malfoy voice the reason that Ron had chosen Lavender over her left a bad taste in her mouth, even if it had just been for show.

"I didn't mean it," he said again, like that was just supposed to make it all better. "You need me to show you what you do to me?" He pushed her hand down to his groin. Hermione pulled it out of his grasp. "Come on, Sweetheart—"

"I know what you mean when you call me that." She stared at a chair off to the side.

"What are you talking about?"

Hermione huffed. His fake insult bothered her more than it should have, more than she would have liked. She had heard things like that many times before and ignored it, but this time she couldn't seem to shake it. And deep down she knew it was because Malfoy had been the one to say it. "It's just—"

The corridor outside grew loud with voices and she knew it wouldn't be long before students from the next class began to filter in.

Draco must have had the same thought because he looked annoyed for a moment before wrapping his hand around the back of her neck. He pressed his lips to hers before she could think and then said, "Tell me tonight, okay? Meet me in the Restricted Section," before walking briskly towards the door, pulling it open and disappearing into the throng of people outside.

Hermione stood there, mouth open and slightly wet from his kiss, staring as the door closed slowly behind him.

Hermione frowned. She had spent the last two hours helping Harry brainstorm how to get the memory he needed from Slughorn. She loved him, but goodness, he could be stubborn and every time he pulled out the Prince's potion book to look for the answer in there she couldn't help but glare at it like it was the thing leading Harry astray from his mission.

Having Ron with them helped though and she breathed a little easier now that he was back in her life again. It was still a little awkward between them, but it was getting better. Sometimes it even felt like it had before. Except that he was still dating Lavender and she was having sex with Draco Malfoy. So... not *exactly* like it had been before.

Hermione pinched her lips together, trying to suppress the thoughts of her and Malfoy and ducked her head down behind the large leather cover of her book to hide her rosy cheeks. Malfoy would have made some sleazy comment about how those weren't her only cheeks that turned red. She couldn't think about that, not here, not now. Not with her friends right next to her.

She glanced over the top of her book at Ron who was working on an essay for Snape with his tongue between his teeth. The tip of his quill brushed his nose and he sneezed.

"Bless you," Hermione said quickly.

Ron looked up at her, his mouth pulling in an easy smile. "Thanks."

Harry interrupted the moment, which she was not ungrateful for. Things were... different between her and Ron. Their friendship had returned, although on shaky soil, but other things had seemed to return too. Things like feelings she thought she had squashed. Feelings that made her *very* confused because they almost felt like— Nope. She was *not* thinking about him. Or the way he'd raise one brow up if he knew about the bubbles simmer low inside her. Or his lips curling up into a cheeky grin. *No*.

At least she had a lot of her plate keeping her busy. Professors were starting to talk more seriously about end of year exams and the importance of them if students wanted to carry on in their chosen subjects to the final NEWT level next year. Hermione was very excited to progress further and was throwing herself into her schoolwork even more than she usually did. It was a good distraction for when Ron walked off to join Lavender late in the evenings or when Harry had a lesson with Dumbledore.

But next weekend offered an exciting opportunity for sixth years who were coming of age soon. There was to be an extra Apparition lesson in Hogsmeade and Hermione was buzzing over it. Ron was, as always, extremely nervous, but Hermione could not have been more excited.

It also meant that they got to get out of the castle for a day and that in itself was worth giving up a Saturday for an extra lesson. Their last Hogsmeade weekend had been cancelled due to the increased security measures and what had happened to Katie there. Now that Ron had been attacked too, there was no telling when their next chance to get out of the school would be.

She chewed on her lip, still trying to figure out who could have gotten Katie that necklace and poisoned the mead that Ron had drank. Harry, of course, was convinced it was Malfoy. She had rolled her eyes when he went into his theory again and then told him to focus on the

memory for Dumbledore and not on Malfoy. Because *she* needed to not focus on Malfoy and it was hard when her best friend brought him up every five seconds.

“How d’you spell ‘belligerent’?” Ron frowned down at his essay. “It can’t be B-U-M—”

“No, it isn’t,” Hermione said quickly, holding back a laugh. ‘And ‘augury’ doesn’t begin with O-R-G either.’ What kind of essay was he writing? “What kind of quill are you using?”

“It’s one of Fred and George’s Spell-Check ones... but I think the charm must be wearing off...” His red brows fell over his eyes as he scanned the parchment in front of him.

“Yes, it must.” Hermione pointed at the title at the top of the page. “Because we were asked how we’d deal with dementors, not ‘Dugbogs’ and I don’t remember you changing your name to ‘Roonil Wazlib’ either.”

“Ah no!” Ron exclaimed, his broad shoulders sagging. He had put a bit more onto his frame this year from Quidditch. Hermione tore her eyes away from him and glanced back down at his essay.

“Maybe you should,” Harry joked. “Might help you dodge your girlfriend.” He nodded to Lavender a few tables away, working on a star chart with Parvati for Divination.

“It’s okay, we can fix it.” Hermione pulled the essay out of Ron’s hands and set to work on it, tapping her wand on the misspelled words and watching the ink correct itself into the proper spelling.

Ron leaned back into his chair and rubbed his eyes with one hand. “I love you, Hermione.”

She nearly dropped her wand. Her stomach did half a dozen backflips inside her and her blood sang as it raced into her heart. She knew he didn’t mean it, not like that, but still... hearing those words... Hermione felt herself blush again and this time, didn’t think about what comments Malfoy would have made. Just replaying Ron’s voice a few times over in her head.

She glanced back over to her dorm mates. “Don’t let Lavender hear you saying that.”

She had enough trouble from Ron’s girlfriend already and did not want any more. Although, it had felt incredibly great to stand up to her in the courtyard. Telling her off and—

“What’s gotten into you?” Lavender asked.

*“Something bigger and better than what’s gotten into **you**.”*

Something in the back of her mind was also very glad that Malfoy hadn’t heard him say that either.

Hermione blinked her eyes wide and tried to focus on fixing Ron’s essay while he and Harry talked about his failing relationship. Normally she would have been mildly interested in hearing how miserable Ron was with Lavender, but although she wasn’t one of Hermione’s favorite people, she would never have said Lavender was a dumb girl. And she had been watching Hermione for some time now. Hermione had been careful, or course; neither her nor Malfoy had wanted this to get out, but Nott had almost caught them. How careful had they been?

She needed to stop thinking about him. She needed to put everything about him out of her mind and just focus on her studies and spend her free time helping out Harry. He needed the memory and Dumbledore wouldn't have asked if it wasn't important. And if Dumbledore thought it was important then that meant it would help in the war that was coming. She didn't even want to think about what *that* would mean for the two of them.

There was no two of them. She had to remember that. She needed to put him out of her mind entirely.

Hermione finished Ron's essay and handed it back to him.

"Thanks Hermione, I owe you one."

"Really, it was nothing." She smiled and shook her head.

"I mean it," Ron's hand touched hers as he took the essay from her. His blue eyes shone like sparkling water and crinkled with his smile. "I don't know what I would do without you."

A small high-pitched noise and a thin smile was her only response.

The dark hallway stretched out in front of her. Her arms pumped at her sides and her hair blew back from her face as she ran harder, her breath burning in her lungs. She felt like she was running through water, moving slowly although she was trying as hard as she could to reach the door at the end of the hallway.

"Come on, Hermione! Hurry!" Ron beckoned her forward, holding the door open. She reached out her hand, trying to grab onto his. So close; she could see his palm, red and open, feel the heat of it on her fingers but something was holding her back. She couldn't quite get a hold of him.

Hermione was screaming, tossing her arms and legs wildly as the arms closed around her, dragging her backwards down the dark hallway.

"Hermione!" Ron was shouting, panic on his face, but he made no move to follow her, just standing there with his hand held out.

Her messy curls fell into her face, blocking her view of the open door, growing smaller as whoever had grabbed a hold of her hauled her farther away. It had happened. A Death Eater had caught her in the Department of Mysteries. They would torture her, they would kill her. They would make Harry give up the prophecy to save her and it would all be for nothing.

The smooth tiles of the hallway turned into books, old, musty books sitting on high shelves. Hermione pulled at the arms, clawing at them, trying to get them off of her, but they were draped in black robes and the hands covered in leather gloves. All her efforts failed. Finally the Death Eater shoved her against the wall of books and Hermione felt her head hit a shelf. Hard.

Half a second she took to try and clear her dazed head, but that was all he needed as he threw his body against hers, pinning her to the shelf behind her. His hands moved over her, sliding down her sides and gripping her waist roughly. She could hear his breathing behind

the mask, heavy and heated. A hot shot of adrenaline rushed through her and she looked up into the cold metal mask bearing down on her. Shining silver eyes were glaring down at her.

“Forget something?” The Death Eater whispered, inching his face closer to hers. “Sweetheart?”

Hermione jerked awake. She was out of breath as if she really had been running down the darkened halls of the Department of Mysteries. It was a dream, that was all, just a dream. She hadn’t been running, she hadn’t been caught, but the Death Eater... She knew those eyes, she knew that voice. Hermione closed her eyes for a moment. But *he* wasn’t a Death Eater. Malfoy couldn’t possibly be—

Good Godric, Malfoy!

She was supposed to have met him tonight. It had completely slipped her mind once she, Harry, and Ron had started hanging out. Hermione threw her legs over the side of the bed and grabbed her robe, slipping it on. He was going to be so upset that she didn’t show up. Would he even still be there? She had to check either way. If he wasn’t, then she’d deal with this in the morning and if he was... He was sure to make her pay for her tardiness. Oh my.

“Where are you going?” Lavender asked sleepily, rolling over in her bed as Hermione pulled the dormitory door open.

“Couldn’t sleep. Just going to go read downstairs.” She made up the lie quickly. Lavender’s brows pulled together and she rubbed her eye. Hermione gave her a little shrug and a flat smile, hoping to dispel any questions Lavender might have before pulling the door behind her.

She ignored Lavender when she called out, “You forgot your book!”

“Well, well, well. Look who finally decided to show up.”

Draco was drunk. He had waited all evening for Granger to appear and gotten bored. And without Granger the best cure for boredom was a bottle of Ogden’s. He tried to sneer at her, but his lips twisted and it came out more of a half grin. Damn whisky. Damn Granger.

“I’m sorry,” she huffed, breathing hard. “I didn’t mean to keep you waiting.”

Draco sauntered over to her. He wasn’t normally a happy drunk, but seeing Granger had put him in a good mood. She was here. With him. He stopped in front of her, swaying a little on his feet and reached out, touching a curl near her face.

Granger sucked in a quick breath, holding it in her chest. Her chocolate eyes widened and her pupils expanded a little. Draco smirked. He loved the effect he had on her. Loved that she breathed a little faster when he looked at her, got wet when he touched her. Draco pushed his hand into her tousled hair, running his fingers through it.

“Malfoy... What are you doing?”

He slid his eyes to her face and saw the confused expression there. It was only then that he realized that he was running his hand through her hair repeatedly and while her breath had

quieted, his own was now heavy.

Draco pulled his hand back out of her hair and caught a whiff of the cinnamon vanilla that always hung on her. God, he could eat her whole.

“What did you just say?” Granger’s asked, looking at him like he had gone mad. Had he said something by accident?

“Huh?” Draco tried to focus on her face. Such a pretty face. Big eyes, sloping nose, pretty pink lips. Those lips...

Granger pushed him back. When did his face get so close to hers? Why was his mouth open? “You smell like a rag at the Hog’s Head.” She wrinkled her nose and *fucking hell* she looked adorable.

“It’s not my fault,” he mumbled. “I was left unsup— unsupervisor-ed.” His tongue was too big for his mouth. Maybe she’d let him put it in hers.

“Merlin, Malfoy!” Granger pushed him back as he leaned in again. “How much did you drink?”

He held up the bottle and looked at it, trying to make the image of it stop moving. Giving up, he shrugged and took another swallow.

“Give me that,” she said waspishly and pulled the bottle from him. A little spilled on his chin as she shoved it onto an empty space on the shelf.

“Don’t waste it,” he grumbled and wiped his face with the back of his sleeve.

“You don’t need any more.” She glared at him. She was so cute when she was mad. Draco grabbed her and pulled her against him. Her hands landed on his upper arms and she looked up at him with those big brown eyes. He slid his hand around her to grab her ass through her skirt when he realized she wasn’t wearing her skirt. She was wearing pajamas under a light pink robe.

“Did you... were you in bed, Granger?” he asked. She looked up at him guiltily. The whisky churned in him. “You forgot about me.”

“I didn’t mean to! I was...” she stopped talking for a moment. “I was tired. I’ve been having dreams and—”

Draco pulled her a little closer and grinned wolfishly down at her. “Dreams about me?” She blushed. Fuck, she was dreaming about him. His pulse quickened, pushing the alcohol through his veins a little faster. “Was I fucking you?”

Even in the darkness of the restricted section he could see the deep blush that bloomed on her cheeks. Mmm, maybe he should punish her with another spanking session and turn her ass red again. Draco pushed her back against the books. Or maybe he should fuck her against the shelves again.

She tensed in his arms, staring up into his eyes. Something in them made him hesitate.

“Well, I can forgive you this one time, but only because you were dreaming of my dick.” She felt so good in his hands, pressed against him. He wondered if she was still wet from her

dream.

Granger fought against the smile on her lips. *No, don't fight it.* A wave of whisky hit his brain and Granger's eyes swam before him, doubling and swaying. He took a step back, stumbling a little and losing his grip on her.

"Are you okay?" she asked, reaching out for his face, but stopping before her skin touched his. *Fucking touch me, Granger. Put your hands on me.*

Okay... she hadn't been okay today after Charms. That's why she was here, that's why they were meeting. "You're not."

"I'm not what?"

"Okay."

"...Okay...?"

"You don't want me to call you Sweetheart anymore?"

She hesitated, staring at him like she was going to find an answer somewhere on his face. "Why do you call me that?"

"Because I like to."

"It's not like the other names you call me," she said apprehensively. No... guarded. Granger was nervous.

He tilted his head to the side and let his eyes move over her. Thin cotton pajamas and that lovely little pink robe... He wondered if she was wearing knickers. "Don't worry, you're still my dirty slut."

She tossed her head to the side quickly, caramel curls following her. "Still a Mudblood to you too." Her voice was soft.

What the fuck? What the fuck was she talking about? He hadn't called her that since she said it was a hard line. At least not out loud.

Granger turned back towards him, her dark eyes tight. "When you call me Sweetheart I know you mean Mudblood."

Salazar fucking Slytherin, girls were *insane*. He might be drunk, but she was the one who was out of her mind.

Draco took a deep breath. "Granger." She ignored him, staring down at the floor. 'Granger,' he said a little more insistently. His arms felt heavy and his head was spinning. How much had he drank? He wasn't even keeping track anymore. He tried to pull himself together; he needed to be in control right now. "Granger, look at me."

She looked up, eyes wide. He wanted to push her to her knees and have her look up at him like that with his cock between her lips. Run his hand through her curls again...

"What?" she asked and he realized he had been staring at her again.

"I call you Sweetheart because you're so..." He took a step towards her. Fuck, he wanted to touch her. Wanted to pull on the tie of her robe and lay her out on it. Wanted to bury

himself inside her— “Sweet...”

“Malfoy, you’re drunk.” Her accusatory tone cut through his fantasy. “I know I was late, but if you wanted to have a conversation about this then you shouldn’t have—”

“You told me not to call you *that* anymore so I stopped. What else do you want from me?” he snapped. This was more familiar, the whisky burning in him and causing steam to rise into his head.

“Nothing,” she shook her head. “I don’t want anything.” Granger turned to leave.

Draco grabbed her elbow and pulled her back. “You sure about that?” he breathed out and watched her lips part ever so slightly. Not enough for his cock, but enough for his tongue. Draco dove in.

Granger groaned and pushed against him for a moment before her hands closed around his shirt, holding onto him. Draco had to stop himself from smirking so he could kiss her properly. Her mouth opened, soft and compliant for him. He yanked her robe open. She wrapped her arm around his neck, pulling herself against him. Her shirt lifted a little and Draco brushed his fingers against the smooth skin of her stomach before sliding them up her shirt and yes, oh fuck yes, she wasn’t wearing a bra.

He pinched her nipples until they hardened under his fingers then rolled them between them, pulling and teasing. Granger moaned on his tongue. Her body was so responsive to him and she loved every dirty little thing he did to her. He could probably make her come just from this if he tried. Fuck, she was filthy. Sweet and dirty and... *his*.

“Suck my cock,” His voice was hoarse when he tried to speak. ‘You’re so good at it. I think about it all the time. Your mouth,’ he kissed her again, “Around me.”

“Malfoy—” If he had been sober he might have been able to pick up the hesitation in her voice but drunk all he could hear was his name coming from between her lips.

“Suck me,” he pushed his hips against hers. “I know you want to. I know you love it. Love pleasing me. You can’t help it. It’s your nature.”

She pulled her face away from his. “You’re drunk.”

“And you’re a slut. My filthy little cocksucking—” Draco tripped as she shoved him back. “What the fuck, Granger?”

“You...” She pulled her robe back around herself. “I don’t like you when you’re drunk.”

“I don’t like you at all,” he snarled. Another long look from those deep eyes. Well, *shit*. He rolled his head over his shoulders. “Granger—”

“No, no you’re right,” she said, tying her robe back closed. ‘You don’t like me.’ She was thinking. He could practically see the thoughts churning in her head. “And I knew that. I know that.”

“I don’t... not... like you.”

Oh shit. He really was drunk.

Three seconds that felt like three hours and she was on him again. A high pitched noise escaped her as she pressed her lips against his, open and asking permission. Draco wrapped his arms around her body, holding her against him. He reached one hand up into her messy curls and held her head, controlling their kiss and controlling her.

"I want you," she breathed out and Draco was hard. It was straining in his trousers, pushing to get free. She slid her hand in between them and palmed it.

Draco groaned. Yes, yes, yes. She was so warm and soft and oh, God, he was going to come. She was stroking him over his trousers and about to make him come. Who was this girl? His girl. That's who she was.

"Please," she whined. He groaned again, but this time in frustration. He was drunk, too drunk to fuck her. Not when he was this close. He might mess up, he might come in her. Oh fuck, the thought of coming in her tight, wet, cunt made him jerk almost violently and he grabbed onto her arms hard.

"Stop." He growled. His cock was screaming at him, swollen and hurting. Draco pushed her away. He needed to get himself back in control. He needed to calm down. Granger was driving him crazy and—

"I can't believe this." Hurt, anger, and shame burned in her cinnamon eyes. Oh, shit. She thought he stopped her because he didn't want her? She was backing away from him, holding herself.

"Granger, I don't—"

"Don't worry, I heard you the first time," She forced out the words, looking everywhere that wasn't him.

"I can't fuck you—"

"I know."

"No. Fuck. Listen to me—" Her image swayed in front of him and he grabbed onto a shelf for balance. "You're... you're hot and I'm... Fuck, I'm pissed."

She rolled her eyes. "You have a problem, Malfoy." She was calling him Malfoy again. No more Draco. The whisky burned in him. "You need to stop drinking."

"Don't you tell me what to do, you fucking—"

"What?" She glared at him. "What am I?"

He let go of the shelf and forced himself in front of her. "You're mine."

Fire flickered in her eyes. "Not when you're drunk. You're rude and I... I don't like you when you're drunk."

"And when I'm not?" He asked the question without thinking.

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter. You won't remember this tomorrow anyways."

"Granger..." he slurred her name.

She took a deep breath. "Just... just don't drink anymore. Please?"

Granger turned and got a few steps away before he said, "Can I still call you Sweetheart?" She turned and he half expected her to start yelling. Instead, she smiled sweetly at him.

"Where have you been?" Malfoy's silken voice whispered in her ear as Hermione pulled a particularly large book down off of a shelf in the Library.

"Busy."

And she had been, but strange enough, Malfoy hadn't been around either. She had gotten used to seeing him sitting in the Library or lurking in a corridor near her, but lately he had been oddly absent.

"Mmm," He tapped his chin as he leaned against the stacks next to her. "And what could possibly be taking up all your time?" His grey eyes glittered.

She knew what he was talking about. Now that Ron was back in her life, she was spending more time with him and Harry. She was glad that she had her friends back, but it did mean she has less time to sneak off with Malfoy.

"Just life." She shrugged and perched the book on one arm and began searching for another.

"So what, you're too busy for me now?" His tone changed. Colder. Possessive.

"No, that's not what I said—"

"Then lose the books and follow me."

"Malfoy—"

"What? I'm bored, you're here..." He raised his eyebrows and shook his head a little as if that explained everything.

"So that's it?" Hermione frowned. "It's just because you're bored?"

He rolled his eyes. "If you want flowers, I'll fuck you in the greenhouse."

"You know what?" She shoved the large book back on the shelf, causing a small cloud of dust to rise. "Why don't you try not being an ass next time and maybe I'll consider it." She turned, curls fanning out around her and started down the aisle away from him.

"Get back here, Granger." Oh no, not that voice. She was *weak* for that voice.

Hermione paused. She should keep going, keep to her resolve. She shouldn't let him boss her around. But, God, did she love to. She turned back around. Malfoy was standing there, hands twitching at his sides and his jaw clenched.

She walked back and stopped in front of him, taking a deep breath as she looked up at him. His grey eyes were storming over her, holding her in his gaze. His lids rested heavily over his eyes and the dark circles echoed underneath. The rest of his face had a grey-ish tint to it and his lips were a little chapped. She wondered if he had been drinking again, but didn't smell the whisky on him. Just his usual crisp mint and creamy parchment scent... He was sober.

“You’re learning to listen.” He smirked. “Good.”

“What’s next? You want me crawling on all fours behind you?”

“Sweet Salazar, Granger, is that what’s going on in that pretty little head of yours?” He sounded almost impressed before snaking an arm around her waist. “Because that can be arranged.”

“Malfoy—” She pushed back against him and glanced over her shoulder. “Someone will see...”

“No they won’t. Everyone is at dinner.” He ran his fingers through her hair again, just like he had the other night. Did he remember any of it? Did he remember what he had said to her about not liking her? She had done her best not to dwell on it, knowing it was the liquor in his blood talking and not him. Still, she had felt a jolt run through her when he had said it that she couldn’t completely shake.

It was in fact dinnertime and at the mention of it, Hermione realized how hungry she was. Harry and Ron would be wondering where she was. “I should go,” she muttered.

“Why? Running off to Saint Potter?” Malfoy smirked at her. “Just remember, he wasn’t the one getting you all hot and bothered during matches. If I would have known that then, I would have pulled you on my broom and given you a ride.”

She fought the smile that was trying to climb onto her lips and the warm tightening sensation in her lower stomach. “You make it sound so dirty.” Hermione ducked her head down.

“You have no idea.” He flashed her half of a smile. It should have brightened his face, but a shadow hung over him. Now that she came to think about it, why wasn’t he at dinner either? In fact, she hadn’t seen him in the Great Hall hardly at all the past several days and when she did see him he was most always on his own or only had Crabbe and Goyle following a few feet behind him. Before he had almost always had people around him, either his friends or his Quidditch team but now...

“Can I... Can I ask you something?” She knew he hated questions, but he was in a good mood and she was curious.

He pretended to be annoyed, but she saw the half smile still pulling at the corner of his mouth. “Fine.”

“Do you miss it? Quidditch?” It was a risk, asking him about it; he could fly off the handle, he could snap at her.

“More than anything.” His face fell and she saw the sheer exhaustion that he had been hiding for so long. His cheekbones angled sharply, his lips were pale. When was the last time he had eaten? Something passed over his features and settled deep behind his mist grey eyes. “Fly with me.”

“What?”

“Come flying with me.”

“I don’t... fly.” Hermione frowned.

His sly smile was back. “Well, all you have to do is ride, kitten.” His hands landed on her hips and he playfully shook them.

“I don’t know...” She chewed on her lip. She really didn’t like flying. Ron had tried to get her to play Quidditch with them over the summer and she would barely go ten feet in the air.

“Come on, it’s not like I’m asking you to let me tie you up.” His grey eyes glittered then opened in surprise. Hermione bit her lip harder and felt heat rush through her. “Merlin, Granger, would you? Because that would be the hottest fucking—”

“Don’t push your luck, Draco.” She narrowed her eyes at him.

“You called me Draco.” Ugh, he was so smug about it.

“Slip of the tongue.”

Malfoy leaned closer to her. “Where else would you like to slip it?”

She swatted at his chest for his obscene comment and he grabbed her hand as it hit him, holding it to his chest. A bit of color seemed to return to his face.

“Fly with me, Granger,” he repeated, not exactly posing it as a question. She raised her eyebrows at him. “You do something for me...” he played with the collar of her shirt, running his fingers over her collarbone. “Maybe I’ll do something for you.”

Hermione swallowed. “Like what?”

Malfoy pushed her hair back over her shoulder. “What would you like me to do?” he asked huskily.

She felt him trailing his fingers along her skin, tracing the now healed place where he had bit her. She had no idea what she’d want from him. Everything they had done had been his idea. He had so much more experience than her that she never really stopped to think what she wanted. “Something you’ve never done before.”

Malfoy scoffed and cocked an eyebrow up. “That’s a very short list.”

“Well,” she pulled his hand back that was slowly but steadily making its way down to her chest. His fingers left a cool trail over her skin and she wasn’t sure how she felt about the excitement bubbling in her. “Let’s start with you eating something for dinner.”

Malfoy’s face fell into a scowl and she laughed as she turned, heading out of the Library. She was surprised that he followed her, but not surprised that he stared at her ass all the way to the Great Hall.

16. sixteen

Chapter 16

“—Completely irresponsible. Your marks have fallen so far that you’re in danger of not being able to continue with this subject next year, Mr. Malfoy.”

Professor Babbling was scolding Malfoy after Ancient Runes. Hermione knew it was wrong to eavesdrop, but she just couldn’t help herself. Malfoy had been doing a little better recently. She saw him in the Great Hall a few times, sitting with Crabbe and Goyle and although his plate was never as full as theirs, there was at least food on it now. The dark circles under his eyes were still there, but faded to a tired shade of pink instead of the bruised purple they had been before.

He still wasn’t fixing his hair, but Hermione didn’t mind that as much. Seeing the pale blond hair mussed was a little bit sexy. She closed up her notebook and tucked it into her bag, next to the other half a dozen books she already had crammed in there.

“I’ve already spoken to Professor Snape about your performance and he agrees that if you miss another assignment there is no other option than to fail you. Do you understand what that means? You will not achieve a NEWT in Ancient Runes.” Professor Babbling went on. Malfoy was standing there looking irritated and bored as he stared at the wall past Babbling’s head. “You were always one of my best students. If there is something going on, Malfoy, I’d like to think you’d say something...” she trailed off, hoping he would chime in.

“Yeah there is something going on.”

Hermione’s head perked up and her ears strained. Was he about to actually open up? Tell someone what was going on with him? Did he know she was here, listening? Did he secretly want her to know, but couldn’t bring himself to tell it to her face?

“This class is boring as fuck.”

Oh. Never mind.

“Mr. Malfoy—”

“In fact, this whole school is a joke,” he went on, voice slicing viciously through the progress she thought he was making. “Who gives a shit about some old carvings? It’s not like I need a career in this pathetic subject. Go ahead and fail me, see if I care.”

Professor Babbling looked hurt. She was right, Malfoy had always been a top performer in class, going all the way back to third year when they started taking it. He had always been affable with Babbling and took an interest in class discussions. He had even debated Hermione on a few of the trickier translations and had actually been able to keep up with her during it, the only person in the class to be able to do so. She knew it must be hard for their Professor to hear one of her best students turn on her like that.

Babbling took a deep breath and clasped her hands together. "One more assignment, Mr. Malfoy and I will."

Malfoy sulked away and Hermione could see the tension tight in his shoulders. She slung her bag over her chest and followed him out. The tower was empty as he made his way down the spiral stairs and she picked up her pace to catch up with him.

"Malfoy!" She just wanted to make sure he was okay. Maybe he did need to talk to someone and maybe she could help. She wasn't sure why, but she cared.

He ignored her.

"Malfoy!" she called a little louder, tucking her bouncing curls behind her ear to keep them out of her face. He had said that he didn't not like her so maybe it was okay for them to... talk.

He didn't stop. Hermione slowed as they reached the bottom of the stairwell and someone else called Malfoy's name. He smirked and sauntered over to Zabini and Nott, who had Pansy tucked under his arm. Crabbe and Goyle were loitering a few feet away, thick heads bent together. Hermione let her eyes linger on the gang of Slytherins for a few moments, watching as Malfoy interacted with his friends.

He rolled his eyes and waved his hand dismissively back towards the spiral stairs that led up to the Ancient Runes classroom and she wondered what he was telling them. For a split second she wished she was standing there beside him, his arm around her, maybe playing with a few of her curls...

Would she though? Would she stand there with Draco Malfoy at her side, in a circle with his friends, if he asked her to? The fact that the immediate answer was not 'no', unsettled her. When he had said those words to her, even though he was drunk, something in her had roared and now, she was having trouble quieting it back down.

Pansy's dark eyes narrowed in her direction. "What are you looking at?" she shouted across the hall. "Mudblood?"

Malfoy turned and seemed a little surprised to still see her standing there. Hermione met his eyes for only a second, but looked away quickly. She didn't want to see him laugh with his friends about *her*. Would he though? Something deep down told her that he wouldn't do that, not anymore, but he hadn't corrected Pansy either. Could she trust the same gut feeling that had just wanted Malfoy's arm around her?

No. Hermione hurried away down the hall, pretending to ignore the slur. No, she couldn't trust anything when it came to Malfoy. She knew better than that. She could never stand there with him and his friends, she could never be anything more than a dirty secret to him. It was just a schoolgirl's wishful thinking.

Maybe it was some sort of masochistic tendency cropping up, but Hermione looked back over her shoulder. Pansy had her hand on Nott's chest, Blaise was checking out a Ravenclaw as she walked by, and Malfoy... Malfoy was watching her with a curious expression on his face, almost like he was disappointed to see her go.

She spent her lunch break in the Library, half hoping that Malfoy would show up. There was something wrong with her. She had liked guys before, Viktor and Ron, but she had never had so many of her thoughts consumed by one person. Malfoy had slithered in and coiled himself around her and she knew he had no intentions of letting go.

He had said so himself on a number of occasions. Maybe they had been in compromising positions on most of those occasions and that might have been the reason he said it, but the dark possessive gleam in his eye was still present even when she wasn't under him.

And that, combined with his sometimes playful banter was what had made her agree to fly with him. Maybe it was crossing some sort of line, hanging out with Malfoy when they weren't... doing *that*, but for once, Hermione tried not to overthink it. Every time she started to try and sort her thoughts about Malfoy out they only seemed to get even more messy than they were before. And there was only one way she knew to shut her mind down.

Hermione put her quill down and looked over the long page of rune translations. This was crossing a line too. But she had done it for Harry and Ron for years, so was it really that different that she did it for Malfoy too? Yes. The answer was yes. Hermione quickly looked around, as if she was going to get caught, then picked up her quill again and signed '*Draco Malfoy*' at the top of the page.

"So you finally asked her out."

Ghostie was balancing on the edge of the sink, smirking at him knowingly.

"I didn't ask her out," Draco sneered. "I just... asked her to hang out."

She cackled. "That's a date!"

Strangely enough he enjoyed hanging out with Myrtle in her damp and empty bathroom. She didn't judge him, well, she did, but not like Theo or Blaise would. And she seemed less interested in who his 'mystery girl' was and more interested in what he was going to do about her.

But mostly it was because he didn't have anything else to do.

He glared at her. "I don't *do* dates."

"Mm-hmm, sure." She nodded, her pigtails swinging. "So, where are you taking her?"

Draco leaned back against the cool sink. "I don't know, flying."

"Oh I miss flying," Myrtle said wistfully.

"Can't you just..." Draco waved his hand in the air. She narrowed her eyes at him. "I mean, you 'fly' all the time."

"I meant on a broom." Myrtle crossed her arms.

"Me too," he muttered. Quidditch had been the one thing he really enjoyed, the one thing that he cared enough about to try. It had irked him to no end that no matter how hard he trained, Potter had always seemed to beat him one way or another. But she had been watching

him... The corners of his mouth pulled into what was not exactly a smile, but only because he caught it in time.

“When are you taking her?”

“This weekend.”

“What are you wearing?”

He glanced over at her, meeting her opaque eyes. A shiver ran down his spine. He really didn't like dead things, but Ghostie had a way of making him forget that she was a shadow of a soul left behind. Just like Granger had a way of making him forget about her dirty blood. He wondered what she would be wearing for him; hopefully it would be short, tight, and easy to take off. He had liked her thin little pajamas she had been wearing the other night and liked even more that she hadn't been wearing a bra under her shirt to stop him from palming her soft tits. What he wouldn't give to have Granger completely at his disposal, ready for his use...

He'd always wondered if she knew about the dark fantasies he kept hidden away in his mind when he used to catch her eye in classes or hallways. He used to imagine her thinking the same dirty things as he was, playing with herself in her bed like she made him do. His heart had leapt up into his throat when she told him she used to watch him during matches because she liked him in his Quidditch kit. Shit... she probably creamed herself in the stands when he'd fly past her. Fuck, that was hot.

“Something green,” he mused.

Myrtle's face cracked in a wide smile. “Look at you! You must really like this girl.”

“I don't like her, okay?” Draco rolled his eyes. “I want to fuck her. I want to keep fucking her. So I'm playing nice. That's all.” Maybe if he said it enough, it would stick.

“Right. And that's why you stopped drinking when she asked you to.”

He didn't remember too much about that night in the Library mostly fighting with Granger, then kissing her, then she asked him not to drink. Hopefully it was in that order. He had to admit, all the alcohol was taking a toll on him so he had cut back and not ordered any more from Borgin lately.

He still had a bottle stashed in his trunk for emergency purposes, but he was trying.

Draco rounded on Myrtle, lip curling. Most people would have cowed or drawn their wand defensively. But Myrtle was a ghost and there wasn't too much he could do to her. So instead, she just laughed at him.

“Fuck you, Ghostie,” he snarled and started off.

Myrtle laughed louder behind him. She had a terrible laugh and he hated it even more when it was directed at him. “Come visit me and tell me about it after!”

Hermione was sitting next to Harry in Defense Against the Dark Arts when a slip of parchment landed on the desk in front of her. She placed her hand over it, looking up to make

sure that Snape didn't see but their Professor had his back to her and Harry's desk at the moment and so she pulled it into her lap and opened it.

"Saturday. Don't wear a bra."

A thrum passed through her, landing in between her legs. She was both nervous and excited about going flying with Malfoy. She wasn't excited about the flying part, but she was excited about being with Malfoy. Maybe after that she would be able to discern what it was exactly that she was feeling.

In the back of her mind she was worried that he would fly her off somewhere far and then get upset at her for no good reason and leave her there, but... it wasn't big enough of a thought to stop her from climbing onto his broom.

She looked up and caught Malfoy's eye. He was grinning at her, looking at her like he could devour her. Another thrum, this one heavier and Hermione bit her lip. She crossed her legs, squeezing them against the feeling between them and Malfoy tilted his head a little, watching her.

Her skirt had ridden up when she shifted and she went to pull it back down, then stopped as she glanced back over at him. His grin had turned into a smirk and Hermione knew what sort of thoughts had changed his expression. She let her fingers graze over the hem of her skirt then, with Malfoy watching her, she lifted it another inch.

The lump in his throat bobbed as he swallowed and when his eyes landed back on hers, they were dark with desire. She released her lip slowly and then nodded. Malfoy's rain grey eyes stayed on her for a moment more before he leaned back, tilted his head to the side again, and focused on her thigh. She let him.

"Ready for this weekend?" Ron said glumly as he and Harry took a seat next to her around the fire.

What? How did he know? How could he possibly found out about—

"Hogsmeade? The Apparition lesson?" He raised his eyebrows a little.

Oh thank Godric. Hermione sighed. "Yeah, yeah, of course. I'm very excited to, uhm, try apparating in a more natural setting."

Harry fiddled with his Quidditch robes. Practice had run long tonight and the whole team had looked exhausted when they walked in. Hermione twisted her lips. She wished that Harry would devote himself to getting the memory as much as he did Quidditch.

She was about to ask him about it when Ron spoke again. "At least I won't have to miss a match for it. No Quidditch this Saturday."

"Saturday?" Hermione opened her planner. Oh goodness, how could she have forgotten? Malfoy clearly wasn't planning on going to the extra practice and when he asked her she had gotten so distracted that she hadn't even thought about the apparition lesson.

Hermione was frustrated and upset with herself; now she was going to have to try and find a time to talk to Malfoy and explain that she couldn't meet him. Not to mention the disappointment that was sinking down into her too. She had never been this distracted before. The thought of it made her nervous, what else was she slipping up on? She'd die of embarrassment if anyone ever found out and the slip up after Charms had been too close for comfort. Maybe she should just tell Malfoy their flight was off, but... she didn't want to. Ugh, why was this so confusing? She had never struggled this much with feelings before, even when she realized she had started to like Ron. These were different. These were... These were things she didn't need to think about because she needed to concentrate on her schoolwork and *not* on Malfoy. At least not when she wasn't with him. Or in the baths.

Harry and Ron had started talking about Quidditch again when Hermione finally tugged herself away from her thoughts about Malfoy.

"You both need to just focus on what you should be doing and not on flying!" she snapped, closing her book sharply. Both Harry and Ron looked up at her. 'Harry you need to be trying to convince Slughorn to give you that memory and Ronald,' she turned towards him. "You need to be focusing on your apparition!"

Hermione stormed off up the stairs to the girl's dormitory without a look back at them.

"Do you have a moment?" Hermione whispered. Malfoy was picking out a jar of eel eyes in the Potions supply cabinet on Friday afternoon and she had taken this opportunity to tell him about Saturday.

"Can't wait until tomorrow? You greedy girl..." His voice was low and deep. "Go tell the old Slug you're sick and I'll meet you in the corridor in five minutes."

"No, it's not that," she said quickly, shaking her head to rid the thoughts that Malfoy had stirred up. "I need to talk to you about tomorrow. I'm going to the extra Apparition lesson in Hogsmeade—"

"No, you're going flying with me," he cut in and Hermione looked back to make sure no one had heard him.

"I'm sorry, but I've been signed up for ages. I don't know what I didn't think about it when you asked, but I can't meet you tomorrow."

Malfoy frowned. "Seriously? You don't even need it. I saw you apparate twice already in the other lessons."

"Yes, but this one is in a different environment," she countered, keeping her voice low, but felt a stirring of pride that he had noticed her. "I need to practice apparating in other settings with varying factors."

"Or is it you're just going to help out Potter since it's the first thing that the *Chosen One* hasn't been able to do perfectly on the first try?" His voice was full of bitter spite.

"Harry's not even going. It's just Ron and I."

“Oh fuck that!” Malfoy said a little too loudly and the rest of the class glanced up at them tucked beside each other in the supply cabinet. Hermione saw Ron looking apprehensively at her, his brow hanging low over his blue eyes.

“Language, Mr. Malfoy!” Slughorn chided, wagging his finger in his direction.

Malfoy pulled a face as he turned back to the rows of jars, still pretending to be looking for an ingredient.

“Ron and I are friends—” Hermione started.

“No you’re not. *You* said that.”

“Well, we are again,” she snapped waspishly. Malfoy had no right to comment on her relationships.

“And what are we then?”

Hermione’s heart skipped a beat. She had asked herself this same question many times and never came up with a decent answer.

“We are meeting on Sunday,” she whispered in a firm voice.

Draco held her gaze for longer than she was comfortable with, but did not break it herself either.

“No knickers either then.”

She took a deep breath. He wanted her to go flying with him with no undergarments on at all. What was she getting herself into? She had no idea, but she did know that she wasn’t backing out.

Draco slumped onto the large leather couch, glowering at the rich carpet under his shoes. She would rather spend the day with fucking Weaselbee, practicing at something she’d already achieved, then go flying with him. Bitch.

Everything she did seemed to bother him. When she sat with Perfect Potter in class. When she whispered in the Weaselette’s ear, giggling in the corridors. When she looked up over her paper as Weaselbee started talking at breakfast. Basically anything that didn’t involve him. But when she was looking up at him with those big doe eyes... shit.

She might drive him up the wall, but he still wanted to shove up against it.

But he wouldn’t be doing that tomorrow. Tomorrow she was spending the day with someone who wasn’t him. Someone had poured poison into his veins and it was spread out across his chest, cold and corrosive.

There were plenty of things he could do tonight. He could do his Runes translations. He could play chess with Blaise. He could work on the Cabinet. But the chill seeped deep into his chest, sinking into the blood in his heart. He wanted to feel warm. Warm like she made him. Warm like whisky.

He hadn’t had a drink in almost a week. It sucked.

Blaise had been trying to distract him by playing chess in the evenings he didn't spend working on the Cabinet. He was trying, really trying to hold it all together. He had to. For his Mother. For his Father. For his Lord.

And for his girl. Who he had to wait until Sunday to see again.

Fuck it.

"Theo!" Draco called and Theo's head shot up. Pansy pouted as his attention shifted from her to Draco. 'Go get that bottle I gave you.' Theo's eyes lit up. "Let's get shitfaced."

Hermione was practically bouncing. The apparition lesson had gone great, she had been able to accomplish apparition every time she tried and their instructor, Twycross, had even used her as an example for the rest of the students. Even Ron had done well. It could not have possibly gone any better.

As a special treat Twycross had let them all go into the Three Broomsticks and have some Butterbeer before they headed back up to the school. It has been overcast and a bit chilly outside so she was glad to take refuge in the familiar warmth of the pub.

Hermione slid into the booth with Ron right behind her. It was the first time they were hanging out without Harry there and she was a little nervous, but mostly interested to see if they could find their own footing again without Harry's support.

There were so many emotions still surrounding them; new nervous ones, old drumming ones, and some... some she didn't really know what they were yet. She wanted them to be able to be friends again, but it was hard to remember what it was like when they were *just* friends. Things had been building with them for a while before all the mess that happened last term and she was having a hard time finding her way back to the start with him.

"I'll go get us drinks." Ron smiled and jumped up from the booth, heading over to the bar.

Hermione watched him. He had been her best friend for years and Ron meant so much to her. Although they had fought, she had missed him terribly and was glad that things were getting back to normal. But... she didn't want to go back to the same way things were. This fight had been different than the others. It wasn't like the little squabbles they had or the time when Ron stopped talking to her in third year. It had been different because *they* were different.

She knew part of this was because she had changed over the past few months. And a large part of that was due to Malfoy. Being with him... had opened up things for her; had let her explore a part of herself that she had never explored before. He stopped her brain from spinning, slowing it and letting other parts of her come through. She wasn't just a bossy little bookworm anymore. He was right, she was something *more*.

But Ron was the same guy he had always been, wasn't he? She glanced back at the bar where he was leaning forward, waving a freckled hand trying to catch the attention of Madam Rosmerta. The barmaid smiled at him and Ron got a glazed look on his face. Laughing, she turned and started filling two mugs with frothy Butterbeer. A stupid smile was spreading over Ron's face.

He was the same guy. The same guy who had made fun of her in class to make his new girlfriend laugh. The same guy who had said those things to her after Quidditch practice. The same guy who agreed to go to a party with her, then kissed another girl.

Ron sat down, sliding a Butterbeer over to her.

"Here you go, Hermione." He smiled at her, less stupid, but more real, and his blue eyes crinkled.

"Thanks," she said softly and reached out for the mug. How different this felt than the night Draco had bought her a Butterbeer in the Leaky Cauldron.

"You... you don't have to buy my drink."

"It's a drink, Granger, that's all."

Ron placed his arm around the back of their booth and downed a large gulp. "I told you, I owed you for helping me with that essay."

"It's what I do," she sighed and tapped the side of her mug.

"Yeah, but not for everybody." He grinned at her.

She gave him a thin smile. What would he think if he knew that she was doing that for Malfoy now? What would he think if he knew everything else she was doing with him?

Malfoy... Her smile widened. Ron returned it, thinking it was for him.

She brought her mug to her lips, hiding behind it, hoping that he would not notice the creep of color rising into her face. They chatted for a while, talking about the lesson. Ron was very pleased that he had finally been able to apparate and then they started to talk a little about homework, lessons, and everything else that wasn't his relationship with Lavender. He didn't bring it up and she had no interest to ask about it.

"Need another?" Ron asked when her mug was almost empty. Hermione nodded and he grabbed their drinks and headed back up to the bar. She heard him trying to tell a joke to Madam Rosmerta who merely smiled politely and took the mugs from him. Ron frowned a little, hunching his shoulders. His eyes started to get the same glazed look in them and Hermione noticed he was staring at the barmaid's chest.

Nice, Ron. Very mature. She shook her head, curls falling loosely around her and leaned back into the booth. Sitting here alone she couldn't help but wonder what Malfoy was up to back at the castle. She had begun to notice that she thought about him a lot more than she ever realized. He was a constant in her head now and she... she missed him. Oh dear. She had craved the physical feelings he gave her, but she had never *missed him* before.

What was tomorrow going to be like? They had never just hung out. That's not what they did. But... now they were. They were because he asked her to. He wanted her to. Draco wanted to spend time with her.

With no bra and no knickers a voice in the back of her head reminded her. It wasn't just hanging out, it wasn't like this with Ron. It was something different. Something more.

Ron sat back down again and she thanked him for the Butterbeer and silently for pulling her out of her thoughts about Draco. Malfoy!

Hermione took a large gulp, trying to quiet the remaining thoughts in her head and focused on listening to Ron talk about apparition and the upcoming test, but she was having a hard time paying attention to him. The Butterbeer settled warmly inside her and she felt its effects easing into her brain.

“But of course you’ll be fine. You’re always fine.”

“Hmm?” Hermione asked as she took another drink, licking the foam from her lip.

Ron’s eyes watched her tongue slide back in her mouth and then smiled again. “The test. I’m sure you’ll pass on the first time.”

“Oh,” Hermione fiddled with her hands in her lap. When Draco had sat next to her he had put his hand on her thigh and she remembered how... possessive that simple action had been. Malfoy! She called him Malfoy. Wow, the Butterbeer must really be going to her head. “Well it’s like Twycross says about the three D’s of Apparition—”

“No,” Ron shook his head. “It’s you, Hermione.” He uncharacteristically tucked a loose curl behind her ear. Once again, she thought about *Malfoy* and the way he had run his fingers through her hair. Hermione pulled back.

“Thanks for the Butterbeer, Ron.” She smiled at him, her heart fluttering in her chest. “We should head back.”

“Why?” Ron glanced back at the bar. “Tomorrow’s Sunday. It’s not like we have anything we have to do.”

“Yes, well, I just don’t want to keep Harry waiting. I want to hear if he was able to make any progress with Slughorn.” And she wanted to make sure she wasn’t tired when she met Malfoy tomorrow.

“Fine,” Ron grumbled and tossed back the last bit of his Butterbeer, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Draco pushed his hair back nervously. He had spent most of Saturday killing time and fucking around with Theo while they recouped from Friday night. Theo was good for days like that. He had no problem wasting a day or week getting pissed and living like a lush. Draco enjoyed it too and it helped him not think about the fact that Granger was playing Gryffindor Princess with Weaselbee in Hogsmeade.

Blaise had been less than pleased that he was drinking again. For someone who claimed to be his friend, he certainly liked acting like an overbearing Mother. He had drank some with them Friday evening, but had given up once half the bottle was gone, claiming he had a headache.

Draco scoffed at him and called him a pussy while he and Theo grew louder and more obnoxious with each drink. When they finally retreated to their dorm room, Pansy had followed them. In the past, he and Theo would have taken turns with her on nights like this,

but this time Theo pulled her into his bed, drawing the curtains and Draco rolled his eyes. Pansy was hot, but she wasn't Granger.

He pulled his own curtains around his bed and pulled off his shirt, feeling the cool sheets against his skin. Sloppy, wet noises came from Theo's bed beside him. Draco smirked; good for him. Pansy gave great head. He had trained her well.

But Granger... she was something else. It seemed impossible that she could still look that innocent, that pure, while he was in her soft mouth. The only thing he loved more than having her on her knees was having her bent over, legs spread and ready for him. Fuck, she got him going like nothing else. Just thinking about her made him hard in seconds.

His hand rested on his lower stomach and he felt his muscles tighten a little under him. What he wouldn't give to train up Granger. She had so much potential and with just a little more guidance she could be his masterpiece. When she had mentioned crawling on her hands and knees for him his brain had conjured up too many images, too many scenarios in which he had her doing just that.

His hand slid a little lower and he took a low, quiet breath as he gripped himself. He stroked himself a few times and pressed his head back into the pillow. He was sitting in a chair, legs stretched wide in front of him and his arms hung over the sides. Granger was dressed in some little black lacy thing with straps, holding in her best bits.

She was crawling towards him across the floor, eyes looking like pools of melted chocolate. Draco wanted to lick them up. She moved slowly, letting her hips sway and drop as she moved towards him. Draco's hand sped up.

He could make her say just about anything when he was buried inside her. He wondered how many more times it would take to make her that compliant to all his wishes? She did like being told what to do. So what would he have to do to make her crawl for him?

Fucking hell she looked too good as she stopped in between his knees. Her hands ran up his legs, over his thighs and to the belt at his waist. Granger smiled at him, excited. Her brown eyes burned with desire. She wanted him. He ran his hand into her hair and Granger leaned into it, closing her eyes. What a good girl. What a good fucking girl she was.

He was so fucking hard, pumping his fist up and down over himself. Granger's breath was warm as it billowed around his cock. She was gently pulling her hand over him before she stuck out her tongue and licked him all the way up. So fucking filthy, but still so sweet with that smile on her face. She gripped him and then planted a soft kiss against the head of his cock.

"I love it," she murmured, letting her lips brush against him. Her other hand moved over her tits, rubbing them through the black lace. "I love your cock, Draco. Mmm, it's so big," she moaned, flicking her tongue against him again. He bit back a moan. His fantasy of Granger was creating a bead of moisture on the tip of his straining cock.

"Fuck me," she ran her nose down the length of his dick. "Please, Draco, I want it. I want your big cock. *Please fuck me.*"

His muscles contracted and he sucked in a large breath through his nose. Draco shoved her back from him, her tits bouncing in the lace as she landed back on her elbows. Granger's

cinnamon eyes burned up at him, heavy with lust.

Pansy was moaning now and distracting him. Draco flicked his wand, casting a silencing charm around his bed before closing his eyes and sinking back down into his head where Granger was panting, mouth open, and pushing herself up, trying to get back to his cock.

He grabbed her hips and flipped her over with a deep grunt and she gasped. He smacked her ass hard and pulled it up to where he was kneeling behind her. The black lace tore easily and he could see the red handprint on her round little ass. Physical proof that her ass belonged to him.

“Please,” she moaned, leaning the top half of her down into the carpet and wiggling her ass in front of him. “Please, Draco I need it. I need you to fuck me. Oh God, I’m so desperate for you. Fuck my little whore pussy.”

He grabbed her hips and thrust himself inside her. His hand tightened around himself. She was panting and moaning. He shoved her head down against the carpet and unleashed himself on her, fucking her hard and fast. She was screaming his name, begging for him. Telling him how good it felt. Telling him how much she loved his cock.

It wasn’t as good as actually having her, but at least in his fantasy, he didn’t have to pull out. Draco’s body went stiff and he stopped breathing as he buried himself in her, pulling her hips into his and shot his come deep in her pussy. Granger moaned with pleasure at the feeling of it, thanking him for it.

He opened his eyes, breathing hard. His heartbeat was the only thing he could hear for a few seconds, as he laid stunned and shaking. He vanished the mess on his lower stomach and then rolled over, kneading his pillow and shoving it back under his head. He let himself sink down into it as the whisky and post orgasm chemicals swarmed in his head. Right before he drifted off to sleep he thought about what it would feel like to have Granger curled next to him.

As good as that night had been, that Granger was just a fantasy and the real Granger was supposed to be meeting him now and oddly enough he was even more excited today. He had worn a dark green shirt made from a soft fabric. He no longer had his Quidditch kit, but at least this was the right color. He shifted his broom handle to his other hand and glanced up at the school again. If that girl forgot about him again...

“Hi.” Her voice was high and squeaky. Granger had come around the other side of the changing rooms while he had been looking across the grounds for her. He felt the corner of his mouth lift in a crooked grin at the sight of her.

She had her curls pulled back behind her head and away from her face, making her eyes look even bigger than they normally did. She was wearing a pink shirt under a grey sweater and a pair of jeans that hugged her legs nicely. There was no way of telling if she had followed his instructions from the layers she had placed over herself. He let his eyes move over her and she fidgeted as he took his time.

“Nervous?” Draco cocked an eyebrow at her.

“A little,” she admitted.

“Think I’ll let you fall?” He smirked.

Her face relaxed a little and a flicker of a smile passed over it. “You’re more likely to push me off.”

He grabbed her, using his Seeker skills to hook an arm around her and pulled her up to him. She gave a small gasp of surprise and he had to stop himself from taking advantage of her open mouth with his own.

“You better behave then,” he said in a low voice.

Her cinnamon eyes burned, just like they had in his fantasy. “I will.”

Those words shot from his head straight to the tip of his cock.

Draco swung his leg over the broom and ran his hand up the handle. “Get on. In front.”

So good at taking orders, Granger took a deep breath and lifted herself up and over his broom. He wrapped his arm around in front of her, gripping the wood and relishing the feeling he had missed. He shifted a little closer to her, pressing his chest into her back and whispered in her ear, “Hold on, Sweetheart,” before kicking off and lifting into the air.

Sweet Salazar, it felt good to fly again. The air moved over his face, pushing his hair back off of his forehead and the higher he lifted, the fresher it smelled. His body responded to years of Quidditch training and he guided the broom easily higher into the air, cutting through it smoothly.

He made sure they stayed steady. She had told him she didn’t like flying, but she had been nervous about everything else he had asked her to do and ended up loving it. Draco wanted her to have a good time. A better time than she had with Weasley yesterday. She said she and Weasley were just friends, but Draco wasn’t trying to be her *friend*.

Granger tensed against him and he smirked behind her. She was always so confident and self-assured. Never faltering in classes when she raised her hand to answer a question and held her head high in the halls, her Gryffindor Pride boldly pushing her forward. But here, she was apprehensive and restless. She was uneasy on the broom, tilting back and forth. Cute.

Draco slid his hand back on the handle until it was resting firmly in between her legs. “How does that feel?” he whispered in a velvet voice. She immediately stilled.

He felt her chest expand against him as she nodded. Her vanilla cinnamon scent was blowing right into his face and he breathed it in deeply. Delicious. Absolutely delicious.

He pulled his broom to the right, moving farther into the open sky and away from the school. He made sure to stay out of sight, but also away from the borders where he knew Aurors were patrolling. The last thing he needed was someone to see him with his hand between Granger’s legs in the open sky.

“How... How far are we going?” Same high-pitched voice as before. He kind of liked nervous Granger. Or at least, liked that she was willing to battle her nerves for him. Based on how jittery she was, she had never gone up on Weasley’s broom with him. Draco smiled smugly.

“Over the forest.” Granger took another deep breath and leaned back into him a little more. Draco took his other hand off the handle and ran it over her stomach.

“Draco, hold on!” Anxiety rang clear in her voice.

He moved his palm over her chest and squeezed one of her tits. No bra. Yes, she’d train up nicely. “I am.” He pinched her nipple through her shirt and she backed into him again. He loved the way her body felt against his, even covered in clothes he could still feel the warmth of it.

The tops of the trees moved under them, thick with leaves even in the spring. He shifted a little on the broom after his trousers grew tighter on him, trying to get a little relief from his hard on. He slid his hand up her shirt, feeling the warm skin under his palm as he moved it up to her tits again, massaging them and feeling her nipples harden under his fingers.

Granger’s head fell back against him and he was glad that she had pulled her hair back because he had a nice view of his hand moving under her shirt and the perky little nipples he had called forth. He rolled one between his fingers, pulling on it and she moaned.

“Do you want to go down?” he asked huskily and she nodded eagerly. Draco chuckled in her ear. “Don’t worry, I don’t need both hands to land.” He squeezed one of her tits again and Granger took a deep breath, pushing her chest into his hand.

Draco spotted a clearing a little ways into the forest and guided his broom down into it, landing softly on the moss covered forest floor. Granger’s legs were shaking beneath her so he kept his arm wrapped around her as he pulled the broom from beneath them and leaned it against a tree.

“I... I think I need to sit down,” Granger said softly. She pulled herself from him and took her sweater off, laying it down on the moss before she sat down, running her hands over her jeans and looking around at their surroundings.

They weren’t too far into the forest, but a decent way away from the school. Small patches of light filtered through the canopy of the trees, creating pools of light around them. Granger had sat in one of these and the ray of light made her skin glow, cheeks still a little pink from the wind. She looked beautiful.

How could Muggles have made *that*?

Draco took a seat beside her, bending his knees and resting his elbows on them as he clasped his hands.

“That was...” she exhaled. “You’re a very good flyer.”

He looked over at her and laughed. He almost had her coming at 150 feet in the air and all she could say about it was he was a good flyer.

“Thought you would have already known that, seeing as you used to check me out during matches.” He shoved his shoulder against her.

She smiled and then her eyes flickered down over him, looking at the green shirt he was wearing. Granger bit her lip.

“You look so sexy when you do that.”

“Do what?”

“Bite your lip.” She started to do it again, but stopped when she realized what she was doing. “No, do it again,” Draco prompted.

He turned more towards her. She smiled innocently and then, fuck, she bit that lip again.

Draco leaned in, cupping her face. “Let me.”

Granger released her lip and then nodded. He pressed his lips on hers, moving his hand over her face and neck, tilting her head back. Grazing his teeth over her lip, he felt Granger breathe out shakily. He captured her lip for himself and pulled it. She whimpered, not in pain, but pleasure.

Draco pushed her back against the moss and pressed himself against her. Fuck, this was hot. She ran her hand up his arm, grabbing onto the muscles under his shirt and pulling on him. It wasn’t just fantasy Granger that wanted him, it was this Granger, *real* Granger. And he bet he could have her begging for him too.

He bit down harder, feeling the soft flesh pillow under his teeth. A louder whimper and her hand tightened on him. “Mmm,” he pulled back, placing soft kisses against the tender spot he created. What he wanted to do was bite down on it until she was screaming, but he could control himself. There were other, *better* ways to make her scream.

“What do you want me to do?”

Granger looked up at him, confused.

“You came flying with me, so now...” He trailed his fingers down her chest and stomach. “You get a treat. What would you like, kitten?” He ran his nose along hers. She had obeyed and not worn a bra. He reached the band of her jeans, was she wearing knickers though?

“I told you,” she sat up a little. “Something you’ve never done before.”

“I told you that’s a short list, Granger.”

“Well, what’s on it?”

“Are you asking me what my hard lines are?”

“What are hard lines?” she frowned. She didn’t like not knowing something. It was cute.

“Things I won’t do,” he explained. “Say I asked you to...” He thought for a moment. “Be with another girl. With me. And of course your answer would be—”

“No!” Hermione exclaimed. “I can’t even believe you’re asking—”

“I’m not, Granger,” he rolled his eyes. “I could tell that wouldn’t be something you’d be into so I didn’t bother asking.”

She blinked as she looked up at him. “Have you done that before?”

He looked away from her for a moment. There were only two ways this conversation could go and he had a feeling he knew which way it would end.

“Do you really want to know the answer to that?” She looked up at him expectantly. Well, fuck. He trained his eyes on hers, ready to find the first flame of anger in her deep eyes. “Yes.”

“Who?”

“Merlin, Granger!” He pulled his arm from around her. He wanted to fuck *her*, not talk about other girls.

“What?” she asked snottily as if she had no idea why this was a bad idea.

Part of him wanted to start listing out names and deeds, just to piss her off, but he stopped himself. Pissing her off would only result in him beating off again tonight instead of fucking her in the forest. Plus it would hurt her feelings. And he didn’t *really* want to do that either. Oh shit, when had that happened?

“I just think I should know who you’ve... had relations with so that way—”

“Why?” he snapped. “Honestly, what would be the point of that? Your name is on that list, same as theirs. You wouldn’t want me going around telling people that I fucked you, would you?” Did *he* want people knowing? He certainly wanted other guys to stay away from her and knowing she was his toy would do the trick. Still...

Her chocolate brown eyes filled with thoughts and she was silent for a moment. He was losing her. And he did not lose.

Draco leaned in. “But I’m not with them now. I’m with you. Only you, remember?” he added just to sweeten it. Merlin, since when did he sweeten anything for anyone? Whatever, if it got him back in her pants then—

“Have you ever done that before? Limited it to just one girl?” she asked, surprising him.

Draco slid his hand over her stomach. She was less likely to pull away if he was touching her. She liked him to touch her. “Yes,” he answered honestly. “I mean, at first it was just... one girl. But that wasn’t because I didn’t want to be with others.”

“Who?”

Salazar fucking Slytherin, she was going to ruin all his plans if he didn’t get her to stop talking.

He knew she wasn’t going to let this go so he took a breath and answered her. “Pansy.”

Her eyes darkened. “She was your first.” Draco nodded. He didn’t want to talk about Pansy right now. He didn’t want to *talk* right now. “That must have been special for you. Having your first time be with someone you... you cared about.”

Snorting, Draco tried to stop himself from laughing. “I didn’t care about her. Not like that. Not like you’re thinking.” He had dated Pansy for a while in their fourth year and after the Yule Ball they had... That was it! He had to tell her about that night.

Granger was frowning, looking down with a small pout on her face. Her bottom lip was still a little swollen and he had to hold himself back from biting it again.

“I thought about you,” he said in a soft voice. She looked up at him, brown eyes wide. “I’ve never told anyone else and if you *ever* repeat it...” He blew out a breath for effect. “After the Yule Ball. That was my first time. And...” he looked deep into her eyes. “I kept thinking about you, in that little blue dress. I... I couldn’t help it.”

“You’re kidding.” She didn’t believe him. Why should she? It hadn’t stopped him from teasing her and calling her names like Mudblood long after he had started fantasizing about her. But it was true. He hadn’t liked the curling in his lower stomach when he saw her that night and when Pansy had agreed to follow him deep into the dungeons he couldn’t help but recall that image in the darkness. Once it was over, he refused to believe that he had thought about her until she started making appearances in his personal sessions. Over time she had become the thing that always pushed him over the edge.

Draco pulled her shirt up over her stomach and stretched his hand over the skin there. “Does it look like I’m kidding?” She smiled. Fuck, he made her smile. It was small, but it was his. Her smile, for him.

He pulled on her hip playfully. “I kept thinking about you. I imagined fucking you so many times. Finding you alone when I was patrolling, you’d be doing something you shouldn’t and beg me not to tell on you. I’d tell you there was one thing you could do to... convince me. Or finding you alone in the Library, bending you over a table and having my way with you.”

Granger giggled and ducked her head down. Draco pushed his hand under her shirt and rubbed her tits. So soft. He pushed the shirt up over them and saw her little pink nipples sticking up for him.

“Draco!” she gasped. He grinned. He was Draco again.

“What? There’s no one around. I wouldn’t have your tits out if I thought anyone else could see them.” He leaned down and sucked on one, letting it pop from his mouth. “These are just for me.”

Her lips pulled wide and she leaned her head back. “I like when you put your mouth on them.”

Finally, she was telling him what she liked. “Mmm, yeah? What else do you like?”

“I... I don’t know. Everything. I’ve liked everything you’ve done.”

“Of course you have,” he kissed one of them. “That’s what I like about you. You’re just like me.”

She bit her lip. Softly. A little color rose in her cheeks. “I never even thought about things like this before, let alone actually doing them with anyone. I’d kissed a boy before, but...”

He ignored the stone in his stomach at the reminder that Krum had tasted her first. “I know,” he leaned down and nipped at her swollen lip, making the far away look in her eyes be replaced with sparks. All the great buffoon had done was kiss her, he reminded himself and Granger let him do all sorts of dirty things to her. She’d given it up to him. For him. “And I like that I’m the only one who has touched you. Makes you... pure.”

She gave a small laugh and looked away from him. “Yeah, like I’d ever be pure to you.”

He placed a few fingers against her cheek and turned her face back. “You don’t know what you are to me.”

Why the fuck did he say that? Where did that even come from? He was about to try and backtrack but the look in Granger’s eyes made him stop. Those big, beautiful brown eyes...

he wanted to stare into them as he buried himself inside her. He wanted to watch them burn as he made her come.

He needed to change the subject. He didn't need to say anything else he might regret later.

"So," he flicked her nipple again. "Something I've never done before... Hmm." He gave her a playful smirk.

"Have you ever done it outside?" God, she was so innocent.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Yes, Granger, I've had sex outside."

"Oh." She stuck that bottom lip out again. If she did that again he was going to latch onto it and not let go.

"Just tell me what *you'd* like. You mentioned crawling..."

"That was a joke."

He ran his nose along hers. "You sure about that?" He palmed her tits, pressing his fingers into the soft skin.

She breathed in shakily and squeezed her legs together. The image of her in that black lacy thing on her hands and knees popped into his head again. But he needed to think about what he could do for her. Granger wasn't going to come up with an idea anytime soon, surprising really when he thought about how clever she normally was. But she was too *good* to think of anything that naughty.

He licked her nipple before taking it in his mouth again, looking up at her as he did so. His hand slid over her stomach to the button of her jeans and he popped it open.

"You know, it's kind of cheating. When I tell you not to wear knickers so you wear jeans instead. If you'd worn a skirt I would have fingered you while we were on my broom." Granger was shaking slightly under him. He dipped his hand into her jeans, cupping her warmth.

She felt *so good*. He pressed his face into her chest and moaned into it. She opened her legs a little wider, letting him further in.

"You can take them off." Her voice was soft, but he could hear the want in it.

Draco grinned at her and lifted himself up to a kneeling position and started to pull the jeans off of her legs. Slowly.

Granger lifted her hips, letting them slide over her ass. One leg got caught on her ankle and he growled playfully as he pulled hard enough to yank them off. Granger giggled again and then pulled her shirt over her head.

Draco's mouth watered at the sight of her, naked, in front of him. She started to cover herself up with her hands, but he wasn't having any of that, not when he had finally got her bare. He dove back down on her, pushing her tits together and shoving his face in them, licking, sucking, and biting.

Granger gasped and breathed out heavily and happily, pressing her body up into him. Mmm, she really did like having his mouth on her...

Draco pulled back.

"Why did you stop?" She looked disappointed. She wouldn't be for long though.

"I know what I've never done before."

She blinked up at him, her dark lashes hanging over her melted chocolate eyes. "Really? What?"

Draco kept his eyes on hers as he kissed in between her breasts, then below them, then a lower after that. He kept at it, kissing a line down to her navel and Granger sat up on her elbows. "What are you—"

Draco's lips brushed against her fold and he felt her body tense as a small high noise slipped out of her mouth.

"You've never—" she swallowed and breathed in deeply. "Not with anyone?"

He shook his head, grinning wolfishly at her. "No."

Oh, she was into that.

He smacked her thigh. "Open up."

Granger grinned at him and shifted, spreading her legs a little wider. She was quivering, nervous and excited all at the same time. And... he was too. He had never eaten a girl out before, never seen the reason to. The girls he had been with had a good time, but he wasn't in it for them. He was in it for himself.

Before he could talk himself out of it or figure out the reason he was willing to do this for her, Draco dipped his head down and ran his tongue along her slit.

Oh fuck.

Granger fell back against the bed of moss with a wild moan. She looked so fucking hot right now, spread out in front of him, wanton and willing. He ran his tongue up and down her a few more times and watched as her hands tightened on either side of her.

"Oh, God, Draco," she moaned. He swirled his tongue around her clit and she cried out again. She was so sensitive. It was so easy to make her come when he touched her, but this... Merlin, she was already shaking. He lazily dragged the tip of his tongue around her clit, teasing her.

Talk about pushing her buttons... Draco smirked, watching her as he lowered his mouth onto her again. She loved this. Passionate noises escaped her and Draco watched as her tightly wound bonds started to unravel. He could have her crawling... she'd follow him anywhere. Maybe even through the Vanishing Cabinet.

Woah, wait.

Where did that come from?

"No, please," Granger whined and the sound of it shot straight to his cock. "Don't stop. Please don't stop..."

She was looking down at him, watching him between her legs. She was begging him, pleading with him, just like she had in his head. She was his. Every fucking inch of her.

Fuck, she was delicious.

He grabbed her legs, pulling her down a few inches and groaned as he pulled her clit into his mouth. Granger gasped, whimpered, and moaned as he sucked on it, enjoying the sight of her giving herself over to pleasure. To him. She gasped loudly and her head fell back as her hips bucked up. Draco lapped at her, knowing what he was causing in her body.

Granger came. Draco slowed, making each stroke of his tongue a little lighter than the last until she was trembling, whimpering and he lifted his head up, licking the taste of her off of his lips.

“Godric, Draco,” her voice shook. “You... You’ve never done that before?”

Draco laughed and kneeled back. “No, never.”

“Well,” she let out a low breath. “Flying’s not the only thing you’re good at.” She stretched out, throwing her arms up above her head. Her body curved gently, her tits jiggling slightly with the movement. She smiled up at him, happy and satisfied.

He wanted to look down at her like this forever.

Well, no. That wasn’t entirely true because he knew that was impossible. She’d never really follow him. Not if she knew what was on his arm. Not after what he had to do.

Goddamn it.

Fuck her for being a Mudblood.

Granger sighed and closed her eyes, tilting her face up into the daylight.

And fuck her he would.

Draco grabbed her legs and pushed them back, pressing himself down on her. Granger inhaled sharply as he roughly pulled his belt off, pushing his trousers down. Once he was back inside her these thoughts would stop.

“Got you good and wet,” he breathed out heavily.

“Malfoy—” He had just had her coming and she was already back to Malfoy? He’d fix that.

“Gonna fuck you so hard—”

“Malfoy—”

He bore down on her pulling her legs up onto his shoulders. He could feel her pussy against his cock, slick and warm. Ready for him, wanting him.

“Draco, wait!” she called out and he paused, his head pressing against her entrance, throbbing for her.

“What?” he snapped. He wanted to feel her, so he could ignore his other feelings. He needed to have her, while he still could.

"I..." she ran her hands over his shirt. "Will you take this off?"

Oh, God, he wanted to. Wanted to press his skin onto hers, feel every bit of her against him. She pulled at the bottom of it, sliding her hand underneath, her warm fingers trailed over his abdomen.

A horrible, reckless voice told him to just do it. Just take it off and fuck her before she saw it. He could keep her distracted, grab her face and hold it, keeping her eyes locked on his.

"Are you a Death Eater?"

"I could never trust you."

No. He couldn't lose her.

"I thought you liked me in green."

"I... I do."

"Then just lay back and enjoy it." He smirked at her. Granger bit her lip and he dove down onto her. His mouth took hers as his dick slid inside her. Fuck, she was so good. With her legs over his shoulders he was able to press deep into her, filling her with everything he had.

Granger made a loud, weak noise that he licked from her mouth, just as warm and wet and sweet as her cunt had been. This Granger was making him come faster than the one he had conjured up in his head and Draco tried to calm himself back down so he would last. He'd made her come already, but he didn't want to rush this either.

He grabbed her tit and squeezed it hard. Granger whimpered a little and he moved his mouth back down to it, biting the soft skin hard enough to make her cry out. He released it and saw the pink marks of his teeth imprinted on her. She had been mad when he broke the skin before, but fuck, he wanted to leave his marks on her so everyone would know she belong to— someone.

"Did that hurt?" he panted, slowly slightly.

Granger took a shaky breath. "Yes. Do it again."

Holy shit.

What a good fucking slut she was turning out to be. He ducked his head back down and grazed his teeth over her nipple. Looking up into her bright cinnamon eyes, Draco closed his teeth on it and pulled. She cried out and ran her fingers up into his hair.

Fuck yes, Granger, I know you want it. Want this. Want me.

"Like that, you little slut?" He grinned at her as he licked it a few times.

"Yes sir." She nodded.

God fucking damn. He had to pull himself from her for a few seconds to stop himself from coming. Granger pushed her hips up against him greedily. He took some large breaths and pushed in her again, groaning as he felt her walls close in around him.

Draco grabbed her face and held it tight. "You want me to mark you up? Let everyone know what a dirty girl you really are?"

Her brows pulled together, but she nodded. Draco sunk himself in her and Granger opened her mouth up, let out a moaning gasp, and her eyes burned deeply. He growled and twisted her head to the side, licking her neck from her chest to her ear. He could feel her trembling under him.

He bit her neck, soft at first, moving back and forth in her, pressing harder with each thrust. Granger's moans increased, growing louder and higher, turning into desperate little screams. Draco groaned deeply and let go with his teeth, latching on with his lips. He sucked at the sensitive skin below her ear, moving down and over her neck to her chest, leaving red and purple patches of passion behind.

"Draco—" she gasped. "Oh, God, Draco!" Granger came undone, clenching around him and clasping her hands around his arms for support. Her hand was right over his mark and it made the burning ache increase. He didn't stop or tell her to move it. He didn't care. He'd take the pain if he could have one more second of her.

"Fuck, Granger, I'm going to—" Draco pulled himself from her, moaning out as he came the second he wasn't in her. "Fuck, fuck..." he said weakly.

Granger's legs fell from his shoulders and she looked up at him with an expression he had never seen on her face before. It looked almost affectionate. Her cheeks were red, flushed with heat and arousal. Her eyes were deep like two pools of melted chocolate and her lips pulled into another small smile.

She ran her hands up his arms and it was then that he realized they were shaking. He pulled himself off of her and laid down on the moss beside her. He stared up into the high branches of the trees, watching them sway back and forth gently, making the light fall in speckled spots around them.

Granger shifted beside him, turning towards him and tucking her arm against her chest. Draco couldn't help but notice the growing marks across her skin. His marks. He trailed his fingers over them and she tilted her head back, letting him.

Then she surprised him. Granger leaned over, ran her hand over the side of his neck, and kissed him. Her lips were soft against his, moving slowly then opening and her tongue gently pressed against his. He ran his hand up the slope of her side, resting it on her ribcage.

What was this? He didn't know; all he knew is he wanted more of it. He pushed himself closer to her. She had never really kissed him before, it had always been him kissing her. And she certainly had never kissed him like this.

Granger pulled back and breathed in. "We should probably head back," she murmured.

Draco blinked, trying to shake whatever this was from him. She was right. They had been gone for a while. He let his face relax into an emotionless expression. He shouldn't let her do that. It was too... close. He shouldn't eat her out again either, but... he had liked it. He liked... her. Shit.

She sat up, her body curving as she reached back to grab her shirt and slipped it back over herself. Draco fixed his trousers back, slowly buckling his belt as she slipped her jeans back on.

He watched her. Watched her dress herself and push a few curls that had come loose back. He pushed himself up from the mossy bed and reached down, offering her his hand. Granger eyed it for a moment before taking it. He pulled her up easily, keeping a hold of her hand as he looked down at her.

Granger gave him a nervous smile, glancing around and then back at him. "Uhm, thanks," she mumbled. "I... I had a really nice time."

Draco grinned, looking down into her doe eyes. "So did I. You, uh, might have to do something about these." He traced a finger over his marks that were visible on her neck.

"I know a charm."

"Don't get rid of them though," he added quickly. "Just cover them up." He liked knowing they were there, just under the surface.

Granger gave him that little smile again. "Yes sir."

17. seventeen

Chapter 17

Hermione Granger had feelings for Draco Malfoy. This was an irrefutable fact that she could no longer ignore or pretend that she didn't feel. Not after the Library and definitely not after the Forest. She wasn't exactly sure when they had started, but they were here now and she had to face them. And at some point, she would have to face Malfoy himself.

She was even having trouble focusing in classes, which was very unlike herself, because her eyes kept drifting to the windows, looking at the dark stretch of trees and imagining sneaking off into them again. The patches of daylight had lit up the darkened Forest he had flown her into and Hermione still felt the warmth over every inch of her he had kissed and marked.

She couldn't stop thinking about it. Being with Draco, yes *Draco*, had been amazing. He had been nothing like the boy who she had known for years and for the first time she had felt like a girl just being able to spend time with the boy she liked. And who maybe liked her? He *had* been drunk and *had* only said that he didn't *dislike* her. But coming from Draco that was probably as good as it was going to get. Still... when he was looking down at her his smoky eyes had shown her a glimpse into his depths. Depths she was both apprehensive and eager to explore.

Draco had been... wow. That whole day had been wow. From him touching her while they soared through the sky to what he had done with his mouth... just wow. Hermione had been in a daze all Sunday evening, not even listening to Ginny as she talked about how the Weird Sisters cancelled their tour because of the increased number of incidents and attacks. Even though his mouth had been her 'reward' for agreeing to fly with him, it felt like he had almost planned that whole day to be for her.

She knew it wasn't really true but still, that's what it felt like. He had been amicable, playful, and mischievous; even answering her questions about his past sexual history. She had felt a little strange asking about it, but wasn't able to stop her curiosity from getting the better of her. She had braved the risk of him getting angry with her for the chance to get to know him a little better. After all, she had lost her virginity to him and barely knew anything about him. He had said he didn't like talking about himself and it had proved true, even so, she was starting to get to know him. Maybe not facts about him, but... ideas about the kind of person he really was. Or at least, could be, when he wanted.

"Ginny, can I ask you something personal?" Hermione interrupted her.

"What is it?" Ginny asked, her tone changing from annoyed to interested.

Hermione looked around and then leaned in a little. "Have you and Dean ever... you know?"

Ginny blushed up to her ears. "We've done... stuff. But not that."

"Oh." Hermione wasn't entirely sure why she was asking, but maybe if she could talk about it with someone else she could figure out if these feelings were caused by the physical acts or something more.

"Why do you ask?"

"Just... just wondering."

"Did Ron tell you to ask?"

"What?" Hermione gasped. "No!"

"Harry?" Her voice softened.

"No one told me to ask."

Ginny sat with her thoughts for a little while, playing with a lock of her long copper hair. "He's hinted at it, but... I just," she took a breath. "Dean's a nice guy and all, but I don't want him to be my first."

Hermione bit her lip, still a little tender as where the spots where Malfoy had latched onto it. The ones on her neck she covered up with a glamour charm, but the ones under her clothes she let be. She hid them, but she liked them being there. So did he. And she liked that too. Was that where these feelings were coming from? The carnal desires and secret liaisons they shared? Or were they... *real*?

"I understand," she murmured. There was nothing wrong with waiting for the right person to come along. She didn't regret giving hers to Malfoy, but wondered what it would have been like to lose her virginity to someone who actually cared about her. Even Malfoy had that with Pansy. He had said he didn't really care about her, even then, but he had at least cared enough to actually *date* her for a while.

Is that what she wanted? To date Malfoy? No, it couldn't be. She just wanted... she wasn't sure. She just wanted to know she wasn't crazy for feeling like this. It burned with a cool heat. Like... like mint. Like him. She didn't know how to stop it at this point. She had played a dangerous game with him, but... this didn't feel like losing. Not right now at least.

"I'm going to break up with him soon," Ginny admitted, pulling that lock of hair again.

"I'm sorry it didn't work out." Hermione gave her a sympathetic smile. Ginny had vented about Dean enough times that she didn't need to ask why. She had told Hermione that she did still care about him and didn't want to hurt him by breaking up, but at this point didn't know what else to do. The relationship had run its course.

"It's fine." Ginny shrugged sadly and tossed her hair back over her shoulder. "It's for the best."

Hermione nodded and picked up Crookshanks who had come sauntering down from her dormitory. He purred loudly and made a bed in her lap. One day, that would happen to her and Malfoy too. Their... arrangement would come to an end. It might be the next time he snapped at her and she stormed off or it might be when Malfoy got tired of her like he did

every other girl. How many times had she walked into the bathroom to find some girl crying in there and wailing out his name?

She promised herself, right then and there, she would not be one of them. No matter what happened between her and Malfoy, she would not cry over him. Not him. He might have gotten her virginity, but he wouldn't get her heart. Even with these smoldering feelings deep inside, she would keep her heart well above the flames.

"At least he's not on the team anymore," Ginny went on. Hermione had to stop her eyes from rolling. Ginny talked about Quidditch just as much as Harry and Ron. "I talked to Katie after practice the other day and she said they tried to retrieve her memories to see who cursed her, but they were gone. Whoever cast the memory charm knew what they were doing."

Hermione's brows pulled together in concentration. Thankfully there had not been another attack since Ron had accidentally been poisoned, but maybe that just meant whoever was behind the attacks was getting smarter, more careful. More dangerous.

"It's awful, isn't it?" Hermione said softly.

Ginny nodded solemnly. "It's only going to get worse."

Thinking about the war to come certainly made her own issues pale in comparison. She wouldn't have time to worry about boys once she had graduated and joined the Order. And the war might start before then. When she spent time with Neville, they often spoke about the attacks printing in the Daily Prophet. Hermione read and re-read them, looking for patterns, clues, hints. Anything that she might be able to pick up on to help with once the war started.

Neville searched for specific names and when he couldn't find them, the curses that were used. Hermione knew he was looking for the Lestranges. The last article that had a reference to them was weeks ago, back in January about a family that had been attacked in Gloucestershire. Even with the gory details left out, Hermione had a hard time reading about that attack. Neville had poured over it and she knew the *modus operandi* was all too familiar to him.

It was hard to think about what might be coming and the fact that one day, someone she cared about might be the one at the end of a Death Eater's wand, screaming in pain. But that was the exact reason that she wanted to join the Order once she left school. She knew she wanted to fight alongside Harry and—

Goodness... Hermione blinked her eyes open. She never considered what Malfoy might do after he graduated. Would he follow in his Father's footsteps and become a Death Eater? Those silver eyes behind the metal mask flashed dangerously in her mind. Would there come a day when she saw those same eyes in the same mask when she wasn't dreaming?

He had stopped calling her *that* name, but had no problem sharing his views on Muggleborns to her face. He had always said this wouldn't change anything between them and he didn't seem conflicted between his beliefs and lust. Of course not; Malfoy was always in control, always in charge even of himself. The only time he had let that slip was the other night in the Library when he had let the liquor talk for him. That didn't mean he had stopped hating Muggleborns. Hermione looked down at her lap and frowned. How could she have feelings for someone who hated what she was? But also, did he?

"I don't... not... like you."

"You don't know what you are to me."

Would he still call her Mudblood if she had told him it was a... what was it? Hard line? What exactly had she gotten herself into? Things with Malfoy had gone farther than she ever thought they would. She hadn't planned on conducting this secret affair with him for so long. When it started, it was just a way to distract her from Ron really, but now Ron was back and she... she didn't want to stop.

In fact she wanted more.

It was risky, fanning the flames of her affection for him in order to feel the cool quiet that he gave her when she let him take over. Because that was the best way to describe their interactions. Her first time she had told him to take her and take her he had. But more than that, she let him. Every time she gave herself over to him and let him have control. No one and nothing had ever made her feel like that before.

In those moments she didn't worry about anything. She didn't think about her strained relationships with her friends or her study schedule. She didn't think about the attacks in the paper or the ones here at school. She didn't think about the war that was coming and the parts they might both play in it. Just him. Only him.

Crookshanks stretched, spreading out his clawed paws and then settled back down. Hermione stroked his back softly, running her fingers through his ginger fur. Life for him was simple. She was a little envious.

"Sorry," Ginny said quickly, shaking her head so that her curtain of hair moved around her face. "I zoned out there for a moment."

Hermione gathered herself back up. She hadn't even noticed because she was too caught up in her own thoughts to realize that Ginny had been miles away.

"No problem," she smiled and watched as Ginny glanced over to where Harry was sitting. "It's late, I get it."

"Yeah I should probably get to bed. No use studying if I can't keep my eyes open."

"How are you doing with your O.W.L. preparations?" Hermione asked as they gathered their things and headed towards the girls' dormitory.

"Uh," Ginny was trying to buy time. "Good."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "Have you even been using the outline we made?"

"Things have come up." Ginny's voice went up a little at the end.

Hermione opened her mouth to reprimand her friend when Ron's voice made her turn.

"Goodnight, Hermione," he called.

Hermione glanced back at him, a little confused as to why he was making an effort to wish her a goodnight.

"Erm, yeah," she said awkwardly and started up the stairs.

Ginny and her laughter followed Hermione around the curve as she jumped up the stairs two at a time.

Draco stood in front of the Vanishing Cabinet with his heart pounding. He had come here tonight to work on it again, but once he opened it up, all he could do was stare into the empty darkness and think about the weight of his task bearing down on him until he couldn't breathe.

"Count to three, Draco. Inhale then exhale," his mother coached him. He had suffered under these fits before. Sometimes getting so intense that he felt like his chest was caving in under the pressure and his heart wouldn't slow down for the life of him. He tried to breathe. His lips were shaking. He was failing.

He had to do this. The Dark Lord would kill him if he didn't. His father would rot away in that cold prison and his mother would fade into a slip of a person, waiting for him to come home, come back to her. If she made it that long, that is.

How could it have come to this? He was sixteen years old; other guys his age were worried about exams or Quidditch or girls. And he was plotting a murder so that he would not be murdered in return.

What would it feel like? Death. Would it hurt? Would it be quick?

Maybe he could ask Ghostie. The thought made him nauseous.

Draco ran his hand over his damp face. He had to calm down. He had to get back in control.

"You're weak, that's why," His father had told him. *"You must master yourself or you will fail at everything you attempt to achieve."*

One.

Two.

Fuck.

Draco stumbled back, pulling the sleeve of his shirt up and staring down at the bruised brand on his arm. Heavy gasps made his chest rise and fall, but no matter how much air he sucked in his chest, he couldn't get any oxygen from it. His heart was racing, pounding, slamming itself around his chest cavity; screaming to get out. To run. Run. Run. Run.

The mark burned deeper and he winced, holding his arm tenderly. It knew when he was fighting it and punished him for it. He leaned back against the base of a statue and slid down to the floor. He gritted his teeth, sucking air in between them until it passed.

He was lightheaded. He couldn't focus on anything and all his muscles were straining under the skin against the invisible pressure crushing him, pushing him down and holding him there. He tried a few times before he hauled himself back up to his feet. The skin around the mark was an angry shade of red.

Fuck this mark.

Fuck this Cabinet.

Fuck it all.

Draco slammed his fist into the stone base he had been leaning against.

It hurt. Good.

He did it again.

Draco drove his fist against it three more times before he roared out, looking down at his hand—bruised, bloody, and broken.

The pain centered him and he could breathe again. Draco filled his lungs and blood with the sweet oxygen again, his chest expanding for what felt like the first time in ages. He focused on the ache in his hand, the knuckles sliced open, the blood running down his fingers.

It looked just like hers had. He didn't like that. There should be a clear and distinct line between them. One that he could walk. Instead, it was all muddled and complicated and he had these wretched *feelings* and couldn't stop thinking about how she tasted and how she looked and that little smile she had made just for him when she laid in the sunlight.

"Focus, Draco!" Bellatrix had scolded him. *"Push everything out of your mind. Make it blank. That should be easy for you,"* she sneered.

His training with his Aunt had not just been torturing Muggles, it had also included lessons in Occlumency and Legimency. Surprisingly, Draco had done quite well. He had a natural talent at control. But the few times he had failed, that she had gotten in or repelled him from her mind, Bellatrix had punished him with the Cruciatus curse. He had quickly learned how to take a foothold in someone's mind, forcing himself deeper, farther. And to also keep someone out and to conjure false images or at least, guide them to the memories and ideas he wanted them to see.

He would need it, his aunt told him, if the Order ever got ahold of him. He was a Death Eater, and once they had tortured and violated him for every scrap of information, they would kill him and destroy his body. He wondered if Granger might be the one to do it. Would her big doe eyes be the last thing he ever saw? Maybe. If he was lucky. If his Master didn't beat her to it and the way his progress on the Cabinet was going, he would.

Draco took a sharp breath and found himself in front of the Cabinet again. He looked down at his hand. He wasn't a Seeker anymore so it didn't matter as much that he had busted it up. He wasn't a Prefect anymore either. He wasn't anything but what this mark on his arm made him. Draco cleared his mind, putting up walls and locking doors.

One.

Two.

Three.

Draco tapped his hand with his wand and a simple splint wrapped around his hand. He'd get it tended to later. Blaise was actually fairly talented when it came to healing charms and he never asked questions when Draco presented him with his latest self-inflicted injury.

The Cabinet loomed over him and Draco, mental walls in place, wiped his sweat beaded brow with his good hand and set himself to work.

Hermione was brushing her teeth when Parvati and Lavender walked into the bathroom the next morning. She pulled her robe up around her neck a little since she hadn't had time to cast another glamour charm yet and although Draco's marks had begun to fade, they were still visible. She smiled at herself in the mirror. She'd have to show him before they were gone.

Lavender started the small shower and turned back to Parvati. "He's been acting very strange lately." Her voice was low and the water loud, but Hermione was still able to pick up bits of it if she didn't brush too hard. She let her strokes slow and watched the two girls behind her in the mirror.

"I think you should dump him." Parvati was clearly as fed up with their waning relationship as everyone else seemed to be. Hermione knew she shouldn't be listening in to yet another conversation, especially one about Ron and Lavender's relationship, but... she leaned over and spit into the sink before lifting the brush back to her mouth.

"No, no," Lavender countered. "I think... I just need to show him that we are good together. Remember how sweet he was when he got back from the Apparition lessons?"

Hermione fought her eyes as they tried to roll. So after he had spent the day with her and tried to flirt with Madam Rosmerta, Ron had come back and been a *wonderful* boyfriend to Lavender. After all his complaints and comments about how he was annoyed with her and wished their relationship was over, it hadn't stopped him from going back to her.

Hermione rinsed her toothbrush off and tapped it against the side of the sink. But then again, she had flown off with Malfoy and let him... Hermione blinked at herself in the mirror, looking at the little bruise like marks running down her neck. She shivered, remembering the feel of his mouth when he made them.

"And that night," Lavender's tone turned excited. "I, uh, you know," she whispered, grinning while she piled her blonde hair up on top of her head and kicked off her slippers.

Parvati gasped. "You had sex with him again? I thought you said you weren't going to anymore until he started to treat you better!"

Hermione gripped the sink to steady herself. She had... assumed that Ron and Lavender had progressed to that level long ago. It was pretty obvious, really, but somehow still a shock to hear it so blatantly. Would she feel the same if it had been Harry? Would Ron be shocked if he heard she had slept with someone? Of course he would. No one had ever seen her as... sexy before. No one but Draco.

She didn't feel the same about Ron anymore, but... this was all just a reminder of why he had chosen Lavender over her in the first place. Her emotions were all mixed up inside her; friends, enemies, romantic, sexual... they blew through her, whipping and twisting quickly.

"I didn't sleep with him," Lavender continued and pulled back the shower curtain. "Just a little blow job."

They fell into a fit of giggles and Hermione felt something clench uncomfortably around her stomach. At first she wondered why she felt odd about this when the feelings she had for Ron didn't feel like the ones she had for Draco then she realized that these weren't for Ron at all. They were for Lavender. She felt *bad* for Lavender.

She was here, thinking that there was a future for her and Ron and had no idea that he had spent the last two weeks talking about how he didn't want her anymore. He had let her go down on him when he knew, *he knew*, it was ending.

Lavender pulled the tie around her robe and let it slip from her shoulders. "He'll have to earn it if he wants this again." She swung the tie a little and shook her shoulders.

Parvati giggled. "You're so bad!"

Hermione had enough. She tucked her toothbrush bag in her bag and closed it tightly. She stalked out of the bathroom and threw her bag on her bed, pacing beside it a few times. Her eyes kept cutting over it and then she sighed, took it off the bed and put it in its proper drawer like she always did. She did slam it close though.

She was mad at Ron. He could be careless sometimes with other people's feelings and she knew what that felt like. It had cut into her, seeing Lavender still excited about him when the only reason they were still together was that Ron didn't have the... balls, *yeah balls*, to break it off with her.

She didn't talk to him in Potions, choosing to focus on Slughorn's lecture on Dreamless Sleep Potions. Maybe she should consider brewing some; it might take care of those pesky nightmares about the Department of Mysteries. She still had some Moly left over and could probably sneak some Sopophorous beans from the supply cabinet when no one was looking. Oh my, when had she gotten so flippant about stealing?

Probably around the same time she decided to have sex with Malfoy.

Hermione tried not to think about Ron for the rest of the day. And instead, Malfoy slithered in. He always did. Anytime she had a free thought, it found its way back to him. Just like she did.

By the afternoon the sun had gradually burned away the hanging fog of the morning and Hermione walked confidently down to Herbology, a small skip in her step. Spring was starting to take back the ground from the cold grip of winter with patches of startling green grass cropping up and little songbirds darting back and forth overhead. She watched as the fog rolled back into the dark confines of the Forbidden Forest and bit her lip. Her thoughts followed it into the strong branches of the silent trees.

She took a place between Harry and Neville and slid her gloves over her hands; pulling them up over her wrists firmly so she would be ready the moment Professor Sprout started her lesson. Harry was struggling with his, as they had grown a little tighter since last year. He grunted as he pulled them further onto his hands.

"You should just order some new ones," she chided.

"I've been meaning to," Harry growled. "I just keep, uh! Forgetting with, *urg*, everything else going ON!" The gloves finally slipped the rest of the way on and he flexed his hand a few times, stretching them.

“Well you really should,” Hermione lowered her voice. “You remember what Diagon Alley was like last summer and it was even worse when I went back over break. You might not be able to get them soon.”

Harry stared down into the empty pot in front of him. “I don’t think I’ll be doing much gardening in the near future.” He sighed and his green eyes darkened behind his glasses.

Things had been getting worse as of late. Reports of attacks in the Prophet to the point where almost every student at the school seemed to have a family member or friend who was affected by them. And Harry most of all. Hermione’s heart went out to him. She knew he took every attack, every death, as a personal responsibility.

She placed her gloved hand on his shoulder. “It’s going to be okay, Harry,” she said as gently as she could.

“Yeah, right.” He picked at a loose thread in the stitching at his wrist.

“She’s right, mate,” Ron chimed in from Harry’s other side. “You’ll get that memory from Slughorn somehow.”

“How?” Harry snapped. “I’m all out of ideas.”

Ron opened his mouth then closed it. Harry sighed again and turned back to his empty pot. Hermione ignored him, turning back to the front of the class.

As she waited for Professor Sprout to start Hermione felt a strange burden of guilt. Maybe if she hadn’t been so occupied with Malfoy she would have been able to figure out how to help Harry with this. He was counting on her.

She looked out over the greenhouse and let her mind wander. Maybe Harry could get Slughorn a gift; he was certainly open to flattery. Although, Malfoy’s attempts at appeasing him had failed from the start. But while Slughorn liked talented students, he did not seem to play favorites among the houses like other Slytherin Professors had. And no one in the Slug Club had parents who were affiliated with the Death Eaters either.

Death Eaters... Her dream of the silver eyes in the metal mask flashed in her head again. But it was just a dream. Malfoy wasn’t a Death Eater. He was so young... but both Harry and Ron had wanted to join the Order ever since they found out about its existence. And her too. Whatever the future held for her, the Order was certainly part of it. Was it possible that... No. It was just silly. Hermione shook her head to clear it. Draco *wasn’t* a Death Eater.

But there was someone dangerous at the school or at least with access to it. Someone who had cursed Katie and poisoned Ron. She glanced over to Ron who had somehow managed to get Harry laughing at something pointed at something that looked like an angry potato with fangs. Of course Harry thought that Malfoy was behind the attacks. Had he discussed any of that with Dumbledore, she wondered? Both incidents had been attempts to harm the Headmaster. But when he was present in the Great Hall, he looked just as serene and calm as he always had. If Dumbledore wasn’t worried about Malfoy then there was no reason she needed to be.

She was so lost in her thoughts she didn’t even realize when Professor Sprout started her lecture. Hermione jumped and quickly tried to catch up, following the rest of the students to large crates on either side of the room where the fanged potatoes were lying in heaps.

“It fucking bit me!” Goyle howled, holding his finger up.

Harry and Ron laughed a little behind her and Hermione found that she had cracked a smile too. She felt a tingle start on the back of her neck and trickle down her spine.

Draco.

Her toffee eyes found his like she had known where they were the whole time. He was slouching against the wall while Goyle grabbed two of the potatoes with a scowl on his heavy features. Malfoy’s mouth twitched with a threat of a smirk and he nodded towards a corner on the far side of the room.

Hermione turned to see a small table pushed in the corner, covered in a multitude of long stems with lazy looking flowers hanging from them. She glanced back at Malfoy to see the smirk had grown. He looked tired and a little worse for wear. He had seemed mostly okay in the Forest. His rough appearance did nothing to take away from his attractiveness though and his tousled hair looked just like it had after she had run her fingers through it.

“If you want flowers I’ll fuck you in the greenhouse.”

The tingle continued down her body until it swirled between her legs.

“Hermione—” Ron called her name and she turned sharply, being pulled from her thoughts for a second time. Ron was holding out one of the fanged potatoes for her. She took it quickly and didn’t say thank you.

Even though they were both wearing gloves, she had made sure her fingers did not touch his and turned away from him sharply. She was a good girl, after all. She glanced back at Malfoy, looking smug as he chewed on the inside of his lip. He gave her a sharp nod of approval. Maybe she’d get another reward.

The tingle intensified.

Harry and Ron sat on either side of her as they spent their free period in the Courtyard. The air was warm and the sky cloudless, which meant the Courtyard was packed with students. They had gotten here early enough to get a bench and it was difficult, but all three of them had squeezed onto it. Her book was large enough that it took up her whole lap and spilled over onto both Harry and Ron’s legs.

Harry pulled out a crumpled copy of the Daily Prophet from his bag and started reading, frowning darkly as he read about the latest disappearances. Ron was fiddling with a few frayed threads on his robes and glancing around as if he was waiting for someone to jump out and grab him. He was avoiding Lavender again and although she was glad that the curly haired blonde was not hanging out with them, she was less than pleased that she had to hear all about it anytime she was in her dorm.

There was a disturbance on the other side of the Courtyard and Hermione looked up just in case her Prefect duties were called upon when the voices grew louder. She nearly jumped out of her skin when she saw Malfoy was the one causing it.

He was standing in front of a younger Ravenclaw boy, obviously wanting to claim the bench the boy was sitting on for his own. As usual, Crabbe and Goyle flanked him looming dangerously over the kid, looking up at them with large fearful eyes.

No... she didn't want to have to pull rank on him. Would he even listen to her? Would he... punish her? No, she couldn't think about that.

"I'm going to go over there," Ron said with a dark expression on his face.

Oh goodness.

"No, don't," Hermione stopped him and he looked at her, shocked. "Not yet I mean. Technically he hasn't broken any rules—"

Then Crabbe grabbed the Ravenclaw boy by the front of his robes and lifted him into the air before dropping him to the ground in a pile. The boy gathered himself up, scrambling to get away as quickly as he could.

"Are you okay?" she asked as the boy ran past them, not bothering to stop to answer her question.

"Prick," Ron muttered.

Hermione pursed her lips as Malfoy flung himself down gracefully onto the bench and Crabbe and Goyle took positions on either end making it look like a throne. She rolled her eyes. He did always like to be in charge.

She did her best to ignore him, but no matter what she did, she still felt his pull across the Courtyard.

Harry stood up. "I've got to get ready for my lesson with Dumbledore." He had received another scroll letting him know that the Headmaster was back at the school and wanted to see him again. "Will you two keep an eye on Malfoy?"

She didn't like his obsession with Malfoy for several reasons; the main one being that he might find out what she had been up to the last couple of months and how could she ever explain *that*?

Hermione wished him luck and Ron clasped him on the shoulder before he disappeared into the covered stone walkway, headed back into the castle.

Malfoy said something that she couldn't make out and Crabbe and Goyle laughed loudly. She looked over, narrowing her eyes slightly, knowing that whatever he had said was probably something cruel about Harry. Malfoy's mouth twitched and his grey eyes gleamed in her direction. She shook her head and returned back to her book.

After a little while, she felt the hair on the back of her arms rise and the marks under her shirt tingled pleasantly.

"Hermione," Ron's voice was careful. "Why is Malfoy staring at you?"

She looked up. His storm grey eyes were trained on her, sitting on an impassive expression.

She tried to play it off, the last thing she wanted to do was to bring any more attention to Malfoy than he had already brought to himself.

"It's fine," she murmured. "I'm used to it."

"What are you talking about?" Oh no. Ron sounded mad.

She took a breath and shook her head a little. "He's always... looked at me. Probably trying to mess with me."

"He's a creep."

"He's done it forever."

"Merlin, Hermione, how long has this been going on?"

"I... I don't know," she answered honestly. "Always?" And it had. For years she had felt his gaze on her, looking up in classes to see that same stoic expression on his face, only now, she knew what thoughts had been behind it.

"Always?!" Ron exclaimed.

Hermione silently cursed herself. "Just... the past few years," she said in a small voice, turning back to her book again, willing Ron to just let this go.

"Bloody Hell, Hermione... That's it. I'm going to set him straight. I know guys like him and he's not—" Ron's face was scarlet.

"What do you mean you know guys like him?"

Ron's blue eyes searched her face. "I've heard things. About him. And girls."

Hermione felt her heart beat in her throat. She knew Malfoy had a reputation and she was suddenly very nervous about what Ron might have heard about him.

"Stay away from him," Ron said seriously.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I don't think that will be a problem." It wasn't a lie. It wouldn't be a problem. Because she had no plans to stay away from him at all.

"I mean it. You... You don't know what he's capable of."

"You sound like Harry."

She glanced out of the corner of her eye at Ron who was glaring in Malfoy's direction.

"I can take care of myself, Ronald." Hermione shook her curls back.

"You don't know guys," he warned.

"And you don't know girls," she muttered.

Ron pulled back. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Hermione sighed and closed her book. If they were going to be friends again, then they had to be honest with each other, right? "You shouldn't lead Lavender on if you don't want to be with her anymore."

Ron's cheeks flushed with a red that rose into his ears. "You don't get it," he argued. *Oh great, here we go.* "You've never been in a real relationship before."

Hermione felt those words as if he had thrown them in her face. Of course, he still thought of her as the girl who wasn't girlfriend material, the girl that was too busy with her books to be interesting enough to date.

She stood up. "You're right," she said, voice louder than it needed to be. "I have been single my whole life, but at least I never dated *you!*"

Ron's jaw fell open and Hermione turned on her heel, storming out of the Courtyard.

She was so mad. Ron had no right to bring that up or use that fact as a way of saying she didn't understand relationships just because she had never been in one. Godric, he could be so frustrating sometimes! She made it to the second floor when she felt him grab her arm and spin her around.

"Ron—" she sighed.

Draco raised an eyebrow, smirking. "Wanna try again?"

"Draco." She smiled, brown eyes twinkling.

"Good girl." His smirk spread.

He pulled her into a bathroom, but not just any bathroom, Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. She was about to tell him where they were when he glanced around, looking for something.

"Ghostie? Are you in here?" he called out.

Ghostie? Was he talking about Myrtle? When no one replied he grinned down at her.

"What are you doing?" she asked as he walked her backwards against the row of stalls.

"That was quite the show you put on in the Courtyard."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "It was your fault."

"Oh?" He seemed pleased at this.

"Yes," she snapped playfully.

"Well, I'm glad to cause discord between you and Weasley."

"Why's that?"

"Because he wants to fuck you."

Hermione choked on her breath. "*What?* Ron does not want... he's dating Lavender." But... there had been signs. She didn't need to tell Draco that though.

He pushed her hips back into the wall of the stall. "You hide it well, but you're hot, Granger." No one but Draco had ever called her hot before. It made her lower stomach clench. "Even someone as dumb as Weasley was bound to notice. Even if it did take him six years."

“He’s not the only one,” she grumbled. Malfoy hadn’t shown any interest in her either. Even with his fantasies about her, he had never acted on them until recently.

Draco pulled back a little with a curious expression on his face. “Sweetheart...” He cocked his head to the side and gave her a smart smirk.

She ignored it and rolled her eyes again. Ron had upset her and she knew she was taking it out on Draco right now, but... it was how she felt at the moment. Plus, she wasn’t wrong.

“Other boys were interested in me.” She stuck out her chin a little. Ron was right, she had never been in a real relationship. She had let things die with Viktor, and Cormac... well she hadn’t really wanted to date him, but he had at least asked her out.

Draco snorted. “McLaggen? Yeah, I’d have ripped off his dick if he tried anything else.”

Hermione paused and studied his face, hiding truths he wouldn’t speak. She felt a little guilty that she liked how possessive he was of her. She shouldn’t, but... Draco was right; something in her nature matched his.

“And you’d never have let him. Because you knew you were mine. Even then.” His voice was low and commanding again. Hermione’s legs suddenly became unstable pillars under her.

In a bold move, she lifted her fingers up and undid two of the buttons on her shirt, exposing the fading marks he had left there.

Draco’s grey eyes darkened as he saw them and he took in a sharp breath, trailing cool fingers over them and sending shivers down her spine.

“There they are...” His voice slid over her like velvet and he pulled her shirt open a little more to appraise his work. “You like them?” he asked and the corner of his mouth twitched.

Her eyes felt wide and dry, but she didn’t want to blink and miss a second of the dark gleam in his eyes. “I like—” she stopped. “Them.”

He cupped her face and brushed his thumb over her cheek. “Good girl,” he cooed and something bubbled inside her.

“Does that mean I get another reward?” she whispered.

“Hmm,” Draco patted his chin in thought. “I did like watching you snap at Weasley. You should have seen his stupid face when you walked off.” He chuckled darkly.

She felt a little guilty at the bubbling now. Ron was her friend, her best friend. She shouldn’t be praised for being rude to him, even if he deserved it.

“I think something can...” he grabbed her hips. “Be arranged.”

“Tonight?” she asked eagerly.

Draco’s lips pulled back over his white teeth. “Can’t tonight, kitten.”

Something heavy dropped inside her and popped all her bubbles. He was turning her down?

“Aw, don’t pout.” Draco leaned in so that she could smell the mint on his breath. “I’ve just got a little work I need to do, that’s all.”

"He's up to something in the Room of Requirement." Harry's voice sounded in her ear. *"He's a Death Eater."*

No, he probably just had homework. She knew he was behind in classes, even if he tried to play off that he didn't care, Malfoy always did want to be on top.

"Okay," she mumbled.

Draco dipped his head down to catch her eye again. "Are you upset?"

She wished that she could make out his expression, but he kept his face expressionless. "No."

"Granger," his tone had a warning in it and he stood up a little taller.

"I'm not. I'm... disappointed."

His mouth twitched up into a crooked smile. "Poor little kitten... Do you miss my big cock?" Hermione blushed and Draco let out a low laugh. "Well I'll just have to think of a way to make it up to you."

"I've got an idea." The words came out before she could stop them. He raised one brow, intrigued. Her blood was warm under her skin, heating up her face and her thighs. "You said you used to imagine catching me out after hours when you were a Prefect," she rushed, trying to say the words while her courage still held.

"Yes," Draco drawled.

"I'd... I'd like to do that."

His rain grey eyes widened in disbelief. "You want to play out one of my fantasies?"

She nodded. "If that's okay?"

Malfoy suddenly frowned. What had she done? Why was he unhappy about this? Did he... not... want... that? She was so confused. "If you don't want to, that's fine," she quickly backtracked. Her mind spun, trying to read his marble face.

His frown eased, but his brows were still pulled together as he searched her eyes, looking for something there. "Is that what you want?"

She bit her lip, unsure, but nodded.

Draco's face broke into an expression of what she could only describe as glee. "Fuck working. We're doing that. Tonight."

A small explosion happened in her chest. "Really?"

"Be on the seventh floor landing at midnight." His grey eyes glittered. "I'll find you."

18. eighteen

Chapter 18

“Granger.”

She spun around, doe eyes wide. Draco felt his pulse quicken, pushing his blood into the tips of his fingers. And other places. He wanted to reach out and grab her, have her in his hands again. But no... he took a deep breath, counted to three, and took control of himself. This was going to be worth the wait. Merlin knows she had been.

“It’s after hours,” he chided, taking a long stride towards her and drank down the sight of her in the dark corridor. “What are you doing out of bed?”

She was waging a war with the smile on her face and her cinnamon eyes burned with anticipation. “I was just... working late in the Library and lost track of time.”

That’s it, play along Granger.

Draco smirked nastily at her. “You know I’ll have to report you for this.” He was closing the distance between them and she backed up into the door that led to the Room of Requirement. He was rather pleased with the set up he had made in there tonight and having her so close to it made his heart beat a little faster.

Her chest was rising and falling quickly as short breaths passed through her pink lips. God, her energy was intoxicating; the fearful excitement coming off of her in the sweet scent of vanilla and cinnamon. Draco inhaled deeply.

“You... you don’t have to do that,” she whispered. “You could just let me go.”

“Go?” Draco questioned. “Now why would I ever let you go?” His muscles twitched as he realized how true those words felt.

“I...” she faltered. So sweet, so innocent. She’d probably never had to talk her way out of anything before. *Such a good girl.* “You...”

“No, I should report you,” he nodded sagely. ‘It’s the right thing to do after all,’ Draco said in a deep voice. He slammed his hands against the door on either side of her head making her jump. “And I’d love to see you scrubbing floors on your hands and knees, Granger.” He towered over her and her dark eyes enlarged. “Because that’s where you belong.”

He was so close but not touching her yet. And he wouldn’t. This was his game and she was playing it.

Granger gulped. She was trembling to the point of making a few small curls shake around her face. So beautiful with those big eyes staring up at him and her soft lips parted, open, wanting.

“Please,” she whined. “Please don’t.”

He was so hard he was almost surprised he hadn’t ripped his trousers with it yet. “And why shouldn’t I?”

She was nervous. She’d never done anything like this before. She might need some guidance. Some training. Draco smirked.

“You’ve broken the rules. You deserve to be *punished*.”

Say it. Just fucking say it, Granger. Beg me.

“I...” she gasped and he saw her mind working behind those big brown eyes. Then they sparked. Oh fuck. ‘There must be something I can do,’ she breathed out. “To convince you not to tell on me.”

Every muscle in his body contracted. He had fucked his hand so many times, imagining her saying those words and now she was. This was happening. This was real. And so was the burning in his chest she was igniting.

Stop. Don’t fucking ruin this. He growled at himself. *Just fuck the girl.*

“Hmm,” he licked his lips. “Like what?” He was enjoying this more than he should, but he just couldn’t help himself. Granger was delectable.

She grabbed the doorknob behind her and turned it. “I’ll do anything.” Her voice was so soft. Just like her cunt. “Anything, Malfoy. Please.”

He pushed his hands into the door, opening it and Granger stepped back into the room. Draco followed her step for step, staying close but not touching. He closed the door behind him.

He could hear his pulse in his head, pumping quickly, raging that he wasn’t already buried inside her. *Not just yet, make this count.*

“Anything?” he asked smugly. She wanted to play, so play he would.

In the room Granger seemed a little bolder. She bit her lip and blinked her big eyes. “Oh yes, Malfoy, I don’t want to get in trouble. I didn’t mean to be bad. Please let me... convince you.”

His cock ached for her. He needed her. Now.

“How?”

She knelt down. *Fuck fuck fuck.*

“I’m a good girl,” she said sweetly, clasping her hands together. “I don’t want to get in trouble.”

He was about to lose his goddamn mind if she didn’t touch him soon. “There might be one thing,” he said, letting his arrogance sound out.

“Oh yes!” She jumped forward a little, her face inches from his straining cock, but she kept her big chocolate eyes on his. “Yes, tell me Draco; I’ll do anything for you.”

Okay, playtime was over. He pulled his belt and trousers open, shoving them down to let his cock spring free. Her eyes went impossibly large, burning, making the cinnamon color of them bright.

"Convince me," he growled. "And you better do a good job of it or I'll punish you myself."

Her breath caressed his skin a second before her mouth landing on it. Warm and wet, Draco groaned deeply as she started to work herself on him. Granger moved slowly over him, taking her time as she pulled her lips back and forth alternating with her flicking tongue.

He. Loved. This.

"Oh, Granger," he groaned and her mouth curved in a smile. 'You're enjoying this, aren't you, you little slut?' He looked down at her through hooded eyes and Granger nodded, keeping his dick in her mouth. "Is this what you were hoping would happen? That I'd find you and you could finally suck my cock like you've always wanted to?"

Granger slid him to the back of her throat and moaned in response. She was speeding up, getting into it, running her hands up his thighs and pulling his trousers down farther, burying her face in the blond hair on his groin as she took all of him into her mouth. It was too much, too good, finally having her like he always wanted, always imagined. Too good to last. "Oh fuck!" Draco shouted hoarsely and came in her mouth. "Shit!"

Granger gasped in surprise as she pulled back from him. He'd always given her a warning, but this one had snuck up on him. Just like she had. He'd never expected that the Mudblood girl in the blue dress would slowly take over his fantasies year after year. He never expected that he'd run into her that night in the Restricted Section when he was researching poisons. He never expected her to be *this good*.

And now that he knew? Now that he had her? He was never going to let her go.

Fuck. This was going to be a problem.

Granger's tongue darted out and caught the last drop that had beaded on the end of his cock. Merlin, was this really happening?

She smiled up at him, eyes dark like melted chocolate. Damn. He hadn't even been able to use the room he had set up. Although, the night was still young and so was he. He'd be able to go again in a little while and she could provide entertainment for him until he was ready.

"You made me come," Draco said as Granger got back to her feet.

"Wasn't that the point?" she asked.

He smirked. "Oh no. That's not the point of tonight at all."

She bit her lip, but her excited smile still shone through. Salazar fucking Slytherin he wanted her to look at him like that for the rest of his life.

Fuckkk. A *big* problem.

"Then what is?" She asked, looking oh so innocent.

Draco turned her around so she could see the room, resting his chin on her shoulder. Her vanilla cinnamon swam in his head.

“Oh...”

There was a large chaise lounge, covered in thick velvet. A fur blanket was draped over the side with a matching pillow sitting at the head of it.

“I’ve always wanted to fuck on that,” he whispered darkly into her ear.

Granger was strangely quiet which was most unlike her because normally he couldn’t get her to shut the fuck up. He wrapped his arms around her lower stomach, pulling her back into his chest and relishing the feeling of *his* girl in *his* arms.

“Draco, that’s...” She blinked those big eyes a few times, lashes brushing the tops of her cheeks. “What is this?” she asked sharply.

He withdrew his arms. Granger turned around looking a little bewildered.

“What do you mean?”

“Is this...” she shifted on her feet a little. “Is this a... date?”

Draco would have been less surprised if she told him she was half goblin. “What?” He felt his face shift, unable to keep the shock from it. Then he considered it. He had planned it out, invited her here, got here early to set up... Draco frowned. He didn’t like this. And worst of all, he didn’t hate the idea...

“Do... do you want it to be?” he asked hesitantly.

“No.”

“Okay, good.”

“Good.”

The air hung heavily between them for much too long.

“Because it’s not.” He stated.

“I know.”

Shit. This was awkward. How did they get from Granger moaning as she sucked him off to this?

“Should we sit down?” Her voice was a little higher than normal and she picked at her fingers.

Draco motioned to the chaise and Granger stiffly walked towards it.

They sat, side by side, in silence. Draco took a deep breath and leaned back, stretching his legs out and spread his hands out over his thighs. Granger continued to pick at her fingers and bit her lip, glancing over at him and throwing him a halfhearted smile.

“So,” she cleared her throat. “How’ve you been?”

He watched her visibly cringe at herself and couldn’t help but laugh a little.

“Is that really what you want to ask me?” he said, raising his brows a little. “All the questions you could ask, that’s what you go for? How’ve you been?”

Granger sat up a little straighter and lifted her chin. *There she is*. Draco gave her a crooked smile. *My girl*.

“Okay,” her chest expanded as she took a deep breath. “What other fantasies do you have? You told me about the Library and I did that. And... the Prefect thing.” She blushed and looked down at her hands again.

“My my, Granger, right when I think I’ve got you figured out...” He reached his arm around the back of the chaise.

She shrugged. “Between us, I’m the cleverer of the two.”

Now his brows rose the rest of the way up his forehead. This little bitch...

“Are you now?” He shifted, turning towards her. Granger gave him a smug smile and nodded. ‘Well,’ he leaned closer to her. “I do like smart girls.”

“You like every girl.”

Oh kitten...

“No. I don’t.” He knew he shouldn’t be saying this. He hadn’t even been drinking, but still, the words were coming out and he couldn’t stop them. He didn’t want to. “I like you.”

Fuck fuck fuck. His heart was going a mile a minute, pounding in his chest. Fuck, he had actually said it. Sweet Salazar she was going to laugh at him. She was going to get up and leave.

Her big doe eyes widened.

“I like you too, Draco.”

Holy fucking hell.

His hands were shaking. Since when did a girl make his hands shake? He felt like he had just caught the Snitch and won the House Cup. He was soaring up up up through the clouds and into the sun itself.

“Lay back.”

This wasn’t what he had in mind. He had planned on bending her over the chaise and turning her ass raw before fucking her hard and fast. He planned on having her scream out his name as she came, clenching hard around his cock.

But this was better.

Granger leaned back against the scrolled side of the chaise and Draco shifted so she could bring her legs up. When he was kneeling in between her knees and her caramel curls were spread around her head he swallowed hard. He was going to do this. This. What he wanted so much.

“Take your clothes off. I want you bare.”

Granger obeyed. *Fuck... Granger obeyed.*

She unbuttoned her shirt, arching her back as she unclasped her bra and let them both fall to the floor. So. Fucking. Slow. This was torture. And he was loving every minute of it. His marks were faded, barely there on her soft skin. Draco wanted to latch his mouth back onto her, darkening her neck and chest with the proof of his presence. *Soon*, he told himself. He breathed in deeply, letting his eyes slide over them as she wiggled from her clothes. Then her hands slid over her stomach, pushing her tits together and down to her skirt, undoing it and pushing it down.

His hard on was back and raging again, desperate to get at the girl below him. His girl. His fucking girl. Draco couldn't wait anymore. He grabbed her legs, pushing them up and pulling the skirt off of them. Granger's legs fell back down on either side of him as she gasped with his rough movement of her.

He ripped her knickers and tossed them to the side, diving down and kissing between her thighs, tasting the sweetness he had discovered there.

"Oh!" She was trembling. *Fuck-ing hell*, she was soaked. Draco lapped at her, causing more little sounds to come forth. God she looked amazing like this— flesh bared, legs spread, and all his. Only his.

No one else had touched her.

And no one else would.

Not until you murder her Headmaster and she runs off with someone like Weasley. Draco clenched his jaw. *Shut the fuck up and fuck her while you can.*

He sat up and pulled his belt open. The metal clanged loudly and Granger was taking large breaths, watching him with dark eyes. Before he slid his trousers off he slipped his hand in the pocket and palmed the little rough stone he kept tucked in there. Just in case. And this most certainly, was a case.

He started on his shirt, top button first. Granger's eyes sparked and a bright smile lit up her face. God, he loved that. He flashed her that crooked smile again as he started down, opening up the shirt to expose his white chest underneath.

She lifted herself up, reaching for it. As much as he wanted her to touch him, he'd have that soon enough. He'd have all of her.

Draco swatted her hand away. "Stay down," he growled. "Spread your fucking legs wider. I want to see it."

Disappointment flickered over her for a second, but she did as ordered and laid back on the thick velvet and opened her hips for his viewing pleasure. Glistening with arousal, her pussy spread apart a little and his fingers twitched on the last button, wanting to touch it. But he controlled himself, pulling his shirt down to his elbows before smirking at her, drinking his last fill of the sight of her and crushed the stone in his hand.

The effect was instantaneous. Thick, humming blackness surrounded them like a shroud.

Granger screamed. Draco dove down, crashing his lips onto hers, moaning into her open mouth as he shoved his tongue inside her. He pulled the shirt down off of his arms and

crushed her under him. Pressing his chest into hers. Hard. He felt the breath leave her and he ground himself against her.

He had to give it to those Weasley twins, they made a quality product. After all, their blood was still Pure, even if they had betrayed it.

She felt phenomenal underneath him. Her flesh was warm and soft. Her tits... fuck her tits were right against his chest. He could feel her hard nipples on his skin as he moved himself around on her, his hands grabbing at her waist, her hips, her hair, her face...

Draco pulled back, breathing heavily in the suffocating darkness.

Granger was gasping, her chest rising with each breath and brushing against his.

"Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder..." she said between breaths.

Draco nodded then remembered she couldn't see him.

"Clever girl," he cooed.

"W-why?"

He was glad she couldn't see his face fall at her question. *Seriously, Granger? Why do you even care? We can finally touch!*

"It's hot, isn't it? Not being about to see. Not knowing where I'll touch you... next." He lowered his hand and it was on her throat. He squeezed with a controlled grip, with only enough pressure to make her feel it. Granger gasped again. He expected her to pull at his hand but instead she slid her arms down his sides, making his skin tingle.

He dropped his head, arching his body and felt his hair brush against her chest. Fuck that felt good. Her hands, on him. Warm palms, light fingers, and oh God, the nails... Granger drug them back up his back, sliding her hands around to his chest, letting them rest right over his heart.

"I've never met a girl like you," he said quietly. Her hands stopped moving and he wondered if she could feel how hard his heart was beating. "You make me—" Energy moved in the darkness between them. "You're the best I've ever had."

"I haven't had anyone but you," she whispered back in the darkness and he felt her breath against his lips. The burning in his chest heated up. "You're the only one I've ever... wanted... like this."

If she kept talking like that he was going to come again without getting to fuck her.

"That's right, Pet. You're all mine." She shifted below him and his cock grazed her inner thigh. So close. She pushed her hips up into him. "And you fucking love that, don't you slut? Love that *I* took you. *Me*." He lined himself up with her entrance.

"Yes," she breathed out, the want clear in her voice.

"Say my fucking name."

"Draco."

He slid himself inside her, closing his eyes at the feeling of her warmth enveloping him. Granger gave a gasping moan and grabbed onto his shoulders.

“Who fucks you?”

“Draco,” she moaned.

“Who makes you come?”

“Draco...” She tightened as he pushed more of himself in.

“Who... fuck... who do you belong to?” He slid himself almost all the way out, only leaving them tip in to keep her open.

Granger was panting. “You! You, Draco, you!”

He slammed himself back in and she cried out. He leaned his arms on either side of her head and let his hips buck into her. Her slender body was pressed against his as he bore down on her. She dug her nails into his skin, harder with each thrust. “That’s fucking right!”

She felt like warm silk. He angled himself so that more of his skin could touch hers. Her tits moved with each thrust, her body taking him in, holding him, just like her arms. They wrapped under his, pressing into his sides as she clawed at his back and shoulders, spreading her fingers to touch more of him. If she wanted more then he’d fucking give it to her.

“I love your pussy,” he grunted, setting a hard pace. “Fucking wet and tight and so-god-damn-good!” He thrust harder into her with each word.

Granger screamed out viscerally. She wouldn’t be able to stop it even if she had wanted to. He had her now. He controlled her now. *She was his.*

Her walls closed in on him so tight Draco had to add more force to push himself back in. She was mewling, whimpering, and whining, completely giving herself to him. Draco buried his face in her neck, breathing in her scent and losing himself in it.

“You’re my fucking whore, you know that? You do whatever I tell you. Whenever I tell you. And you love it.”

She made a weak noise of pleasure and he felt her head nod against him.

“Now come for me.”

Her body tensed, legs stiffening, arms grasping, and pussy fucking quivering as her orgasm took her over.

“Oh Godric!” She threw her head back.

“Me. Only me,” he growled in her ear and she screamed out again.

“Draco! Fuck me!”

He roared and relentlessly slammed his hips against hers, not stopping, not slowing. Not doing anything than what she begged for.

He fucked her.

And he didn’t stop.

Granger was crying. Her body was shaking, still quaking with the after effects as Draco groaned, biting her earlobe and squeezing her tit tightly as he indulged himself in her. He finally had her body bare against his and he wasn't going to let this end soon.

Her head fell to the side and Draco drug his teeth over the sensitive skin of her neck, making another shiver run through her.

"Oh, Draco, please," she moaned.

He answered with his own and latched his lips onto her neck, sucking and nipping while he pounded into her. Granger gasped as the fading marks flared to life under his attention then she pushed her head to the side, giving him more access. Merlin, she gave him *everything*.

She was here, begging him, with his cock buried in her pussy... He could make her do anything. She loved this. She loved—

He grabbed the side of her neck, resting his thumb on her throat and stroking it a little.

"My little whore," he said in a low voice. "My perfect little whore."

She tightened around him again. *Good girl*.

"Just yours," she gasped, sliding her hands down his back. "All yours."

Sweet Salazar, did she *want* to make him come in her? Saying dirty shit like that... The darkness had made her bolder.

Draco groaned deeply, unable to catch his breath. His body couldn't take much more. There was a growing pressure at the base of his spine and he knew he wasn't going to be able to hold on much longer.

"Squeeze my cock. Fuck you're so good, Sweetheart..." Granger clung onto him, pulling her legs up around him. Draco growled as more pressure shot down his spine, weighing heavily in him as he sunk himself into her center. "Squeeze it with your pussy and make me come."

Her body responded to that and he felt her push up against him and her moans rose an octave or two. She was going to come again. With him.

Oh hell yes.

She was starting to shake violently. Her second orgasm was coming on faster than the first and her silky walls closed in around him. Draco closed his eyes tightly, trying to hold on just long enough to milk hers done then he could—

"Oh Draco, you're... you're making me— Oh!" Granger cried out. Her nails cut into him, her legs pressed against him, and her body surrendered to him. His. His. His. "Draco..." she cried weakly as the final remnant of pleasure unfolded.

He buried himself to the hilt in her and rocked his hips back and forth, getting himself as close as he could before he pulled back, sliding out of her, pressed the tip of his cock against her stomach and released himself onto her. He could still feel her thighs twitching on either side of him as he spilled himself over her, gasping and groaning.

He wished it could see it, but being able to touch her fully was worth missing out.

Draco collapsed on top of her, not caring about the mess, before sliding a little to the side to rest most of his weight on the chaise. Granger was panting and he wrapped an arm and a leg around her, pulling her against him, not ready to lose the feeling of her skin against his.

They stayed there for a moment, catching their breath and coming down from the high of their shared euphoria.

He was spent. He stretched one arm under her head, letting it rest on his bicep and wrapped the other around her chest, right under her tits. He pulled her close, tucking her small frame into his chest and threw his leg over hers. Owning her. Possessing her. Entirely.

His head fell onto the pillow behind him and Draco sunk into its softness. Granger trailed her fingers over his arm. Instinct told him to pull back, but the darkness kept him safe. She couldn't see it. And he was so tired. Sleepless nights working on the Cabinet and a loss of appetite were catching up to him. He missed the feeling that the whisky gave him, but it was worth it if it meant that Granger wasn't running away from him anymore.

God, that had been incredible. Draco sighed deeply in contentment. He hadn't fucked like that in... well it had never quite been like *that* because it had never been with her.

"Draco?" she called to him softly.

He couldn't even lift his head up yet. "Hmm?"

"It's a little chilly."

Really? He felt warm next to her, but... maybe that was why she was cold. He always had run cool.

He lifted his heavy arm and grabbed the fur blanket from the back of the chaise and draped it over them.

"Oh..." She sounded a little surprised. "Well, just for a little while," she said and relaxed next to him.

Draco held her a little tighter and nodded. "Mmm-hmm." Yeah, just for a little bit until he got his strength back. He just needed to rest for a minute more.

"That was amazing," she whispered. He felt her shift a little and then her lips brushed against his cheek in a soft kiss.

"You're 'mazing," he mumbled. Or did he? He was so tired he wasn't sure if he had actually spoken the words or not. Probably not. Hopefully not.

Granger shifted a little, getting comfortable and sighed happily next to him.

Hermione slowly felt herself being pulled from the depths of sleep. Her brain started to churn and she felt something heavy, a weight she wasn't used to, draped across her. She was lying on something soft. Softer than her bed. Where... Hermione forced her heavy lids open.

Draco.

Draco was on top of her.

Well sort of. She sucked in a breath and blinked a few times, clearing the sleep from her vision. Draco was halfway over her, his arm weighing heavily across her chest and his leg hooked over her hips. The fur blanket had slipped down a little exposing the porcelain skin of his shoulders and back.

He was a vision.

She had always thought of him as a marble statue brought to life, but seeing more of him than she ever had before it was undeniable that he was a work of art. The muscles lay dormant under his white skin, loose and soft. Relaxed. Her fingers moved over the back of his arm, white hairs tickling the tips as she slid them up to his bicep and back down again.

She lifted her head a little and saw his face.

Good Godric, *his face*...

Cool, calm, and serene, Hermione had never seen Malfoy like this before. Normally he had an air of arrogance hanging on him and his features were always carefully controlled, but right now, sunken in sleep, Draco looked... she wasn't even sure there was a word for it. Smooth maybe, but that didn't cover it. Not the soft sockets where his closed eyes lay, not the strong jawline that was just a little extended to part his lips letting slow, deep breath pass into him.

Her heart gave an extra hard thump as an unfamiliar but not entirely unwelcome emotion bloomed in her chest. Wow, that was new. Her feelings for him had grown over the past few weeks, but this... this was different.

His pale blond hair was tousled and messy on top of his head. His head that was tucked down, close to hers. So close that she could lean forward, just a little, and... Her lips brushed against his. His breathing changed, a sharp intake and she pulled back, not wanting to disturb him from his gentle slumber.

Malfoy's eyes shot open, wide and grey like a storm tossed sky.

As quick as a snake's strike, he pulled his head back, hitting it against the back of the chaise, staring at her like he'd never seen her before. His entire body tensed and the smooth muscles were now carving deeply into his skin, creating creases and crevices. The arm and leg around her tightened dramatically and the muscle that she had been resting her head on turned to stone.

"The fuck..." he murmured, but with no softness in his voice. Hermione's heart contracted and the bloom was gone. "What the fuck?!"

Draco pulled himself back from her, scrambling to untangle himself ungracefully as he hauled himself up, tripping in his hurry to get away from her.

"What the FUCK?!" he shouted, twisting his body on the floor, pulling his arm against his chest to cover himself and sticking the other out to grab his discarded clothes.

Hermione's chest and face were heated with embarrassment while the rest of her turned cold and numb. She pulled the fur blanket up to her chin trying to cover her own body as much as she could since he was obviously disgusted by what they had done.

She didn't understand. Last night had been another *amazing* experience and yes, they had fallen asleep together, but... was that so bad? Draco apparently thought so. No, not Draco. *Malfoy*.

By the time she sat up, pulling her legs up to her chest under the blanket, he already had his shirt thrown on and was slipping back into his black boxer briefs.

She knew she was staring but couldn't help herself. She was shocked at his reaction to this. There were no windows so she couldn't tell what time it was, but they couldn't have slept too long. Her internal clock was wound tightly and always woke her up by 6.30. He'd be able to sneak back into his dorm with no one the wiser. Anyways, his friends were probably used to him staying out. Bitterness replaced the soft sleep in her eyes.

Malfoy glared at her, grey eyes like granite, hard and sharp. "That didn't happen."

Her skin prickled uncomfortably and she wrapped the blanket around herself tightly before reaching down to collect her own clothes. The last thing she wanted right now was to be naked in front of Draco Malfoy while he yelled at her.

And they had been getting along so well... Things had been changing between them. Things she liked.

"I like you."

"Fuck," he swore, almost falling over as he stuck a long leg into his trousers. 'Do you understand me?' His voice was clipped and commanding. "This didn't fucking happen."

"O-okay," she mumbled, doing her best to fasten her bra back while keeping the blanket from slipping off her shoulders.

"You distracted me," he rounded on her, belt hanging open. "I should have been working last night! And you..." He shook his head, lip curling up. "You *wanted* this to happen, didn't you?"

"What?"

"You fucking seduced me! Wanting to play games, fantasies... You were trying to get me to—"

"What was I trying to get you to do?" Hermione asked angrily, standing up to grab her skirt off the floor and pulled it around her quickly. Her knickers lay ripped and ruined at her feet.

"I DON'T KNOW!" He shouted back at her. He was wild, irrational. She had never seen him like this before.

Her pride was hurt and the wounded animal in her chest lashed out. With claws. "What could I *possibly* want from you?!" Malfoy looked stunned for a moment before his face twisted in an old familiar expression. "You're the one who started all of this in the first place!" she snarled, letting the creature roar.

"Oh like you didn't want me," he scoffed, arrogance back and firmly in place. "You used to fucking stare at me, batting your fuck-me eyes and biting your *goddamn* lip all the time!"

Indignation scorched inside her. *How dare he?! “Only because you used to stare at me! Every time I looked at you, you were already looking at me!”* She knew she sounded childish right now, but she was mad and upset and hurt and if she wanted to yell like a child then that’s what she would do!

Malfoy looked like he was about to say something then just shook his head in disgust and turned away from her, running his hand through his hair.

Hermione’s courage fired up. She wasn’t going to take this and especially not from *him*. “I was perfectly fine before you came in and— and fucked my life up!”

Malfoy sharply turned, brows shooting up. “Fucked *your* life up? Granger, you’re a bloody *curse!* I can’t get you out of my head, can’t think, can’t fucking breathe!” He clawed at his chest. “You’re burning a hole in me!”

What? *What?! One more mood swing and she was going to be flung off the planet. How... how could she have ever possibly thought this was a good idea? But did he really feel that way? It was eerily similar to how she felt. He had slowly but surely been coiling around her, constricting until he had taken over every thought in her head and inch of her body.*

“That’s it, Malfoy,” she shook her head, tangled curls shaking around her. ‘If you hate me so much then why do you keep having sex with me?! Some Pureblood, you are,’ she sneered, advancing on him. “Well don’t worry, I’ll stay out of your way and you better stay out of mine!”

Malfoy blinked his storm grey eyes and his mouth dropped open. His features contorted so much she almost thought it impossible that was the same face that had looked so calm in sleep. Dark thoughts swirled in his storming eyes and for a second she worried about the fact that were alone, in this room, and no one knew where she was. Her hand moved towards her pocket and her wand.

“You think you can just say it’s over?” His voice was soft, but cold, so cold. “Oh no, *Sweetheart*. You’re not going anywhere until *I* say so.”

He grabbed her arms and she felt the strength in those muscles she had admired only moments ago. Draco pulled her close to him like she was nothing and slammed his lips onto hers. Hermione groaned and tried to pull away, but he bore down more, biting her lips when she wouldn’t open them.

“Stop!” she shouted, struggling against him.

Draco glared down at her. “No.”

Oh Godric it was wrong, so wrong, but his hands were holding her and his body against hers... his eyes burned like ash covered coals and... yes...

Hermione kissed him back. It was raw, feral, and desperate. Hate filled passion fueled their kiss and Malfoy’s hands moved down to grab at her body while Hermione lifted her arms, wrapping them around his neck and pulling his head down to hers.

Draco grabbed a fistful of her hair and pulled her head back. “I told you last night,” he breathed out, “you’re mine.”

“Get off me, Malfoy.” She pushed on his shoulders, but he had her tight.

"I meant what I said," he growled.

"That you liked me?" she snapped back at him.

Malfoy's smoke grey eyes looked alarmed then he seemed to relax. "And you like me. You like this." He pulled her hair a little harder.

Hermione pinched her lips together. "So what does that mean?" The anger and tension between them was changing, shifting.

He seemed to think it over before answering. "What do you want it to mean?"

Hermione's mouth opened into a small o. What *did* she want it to mean? She cared about him, felt for him. But this was much more complicated than she ever thought it would be. They could never be together and is that even what she wanted? She didn't know anymore.

"Because what I want?" Draco went on in her silence. "Is to keep fucking you in all the dirty ways I've dreamt of."

Hermione felt heat rise up in her cheeks.

"And I want," he went on with a small smirk. "You. All to myself."

He'd said all this before. Why was he saying it again?

"You have that."

"Do I?" He cocked a brow up.

Oh... he wanted *her* to say it. She had told him before, but that was when he was inside her. This was in the light of day. "You do. You have... me. And I want that too. I want you. Only you," she acquiesced, then added, "Last night didn't change anything. We fell asleep, that was all."

Malfoy seemed to mull this over and gradually loosened his hold on her, freeing her head and body to where she could move easily again. "You look good like this," he twirled a curl around his finger. "I bet I could make these even messier though."

"I'm sure you could," she breathed out, feeling a thrum run through her.

"You'd let me do anything to you, wouldn't you Sweetheart?" His voice was low and raspy.

Hermione started to feel the warm heat between her legs again. The wrongness of it made it all the more enticing and her heart beat a little faster as she said, "Almost."

Draco's grey eyes lit up and sucked in a quick breath. "I want to lay you bare and tie you up. I want to have every inch of you at my mercy."

How could he make something so bad sound so good? He really did have her. Anyone else and she would have been running for the hills. Hermione knew she couldn't trust him, but could she trust herself?

"What do I get then? *If* I let you?"

Draco smirked at her, smoky eyes dark. "Me."

The warm spring air was moving into summer heat as it sped past him and Draco's long legs carried him forward at an astonishing pace. His breath was coming in short puffs. He resented himself for not working out since his dismissal from the Quidditch team. He was paying for it now though.

He could hear Theo's feet hitting the ground next to him, mere inches behind. Time was, he could outstrip Theo easily, but weeks of being locked up working on the Cabinet had stolen a bit of his endurance from him. Lately the only exercise he got was working out on Granger.

Yesterday morning had been a shit show. He couldn't believe his own stupidity, falling asleep next to her. And without a shirt! It was a miracle that she hadn't seen the mark on the arm he had been holding her with. *He had been holding her.* He was letting himself get carried away and needed to reclaim control over himself. Granger had her lion's claws in him, but that didn't mean he couldn't sink his fangs in too.

His muscles burned with effort as he pushed himself on. Theo was gaining on him and Draco felt himself starting to give out. The sun was beating down on him, strong rays streaming down to the training grounds where he, Theo, and Blaise had spent the better part of the day exercising.

Draco huffed, his lungs screaming in his chest as he rounded the corner and the end came in sight. Theo was right on him. Draco's long legs were pumping under him, carrying him forward with a speed that made his hair blow back off his forehead. Theo was neck and neck with him and the ending line sped towards them. He was so close, *so close*.

"Shit!" Draco swore loudly as Theo surged past him at the last second and crossed before he did. Gradually he came to a stop, his thighs twitching as he leaned down on them, sucking in deep heavy breaths. He'd lost.

Theo was beaming. Draco glared at the stupid look on his face as he and Blaise high fived. Theo had never beat him before. Never. He wiped the perspiration off his forehead and stood up straight. He hated this feeling. So close and he had let the win slip through his fingers. If he would have pushed himself just a little harder, would he have won? Or was Theo finally better than him?

"Hey, that was a good one," Theo smiled widely at him, but his eyes had a hungry gleam in them.

"Yeah." Draco looked out over the grounds, which were turning a verdant shade of green. He wasn't about to congratulate the bastard for besting him.

"Losing your edge?" Blaise smirked at him. He always had to break his balls.

Draco glared back. "You didn't fucking win."

Blaise scowled and Theo laughed. Draco spit on the ground. "Let's go back in."

"What? You don't want a rematch?" Theo taunted him.

"Maybe next time. I've got work to do." He had to make some progress on the Cabinet and soon. Granger had distracted him the other night and he was running out of time. He needed

to focus. He knew what would happen if he didn't complete his task before the end of the year. Draco tried to clear his mind as they walked back into the castle, but Granger's face kept popping up around every wall he tried to erect.

"I like you too, Draco."

"I want you. Only you."

She was burning in him, stronger than the sun rays streaming down.

But would she still want him if she knew what was branded on his skin? Of course not. She'd hate him for it. And not the kind of hate that he could turn into one of the most amazing kisses he'd ever had either. Fuck... what was she doing to him? She was a curse. An awful, horrible scorch that he couldn't seem to turn himself away from. Even if she was a Mudblood.

But she wasn't like other Mudbloods. His father always said they were uncultured swine, barely better than Muggles, but Granger... Granger was bright and quick. She bested him in classes and was actually enjoyable to talk to. Sometimes. When she wasn't asking stupid fucking questions that was.

She liked him too. Maybe... maybe she wouldn't hate him if she knew? No. That was fucking stupid. She was Potter's best friend and Dumbledore's little go to girl. She had fought against his father and his aunt at the Ministry for Salazar's sake!

Draco stopped walking and Blaise jumped not to run into him. "Watch it!"

Draco ignored him, consumed by the thought of his aunt turning her wand on his girl. Even with all of Granger's skills, Bellatrix would have torn her to pieces and left nothing but a bloody mark behind. His heart beat faster. She was a Mudblood. *His* Mudblood. And when the Dark Lord unleashed his final plan, Granger would be in deadly danger.

He'd have to do something about that too. His brows fell heavily over his silver eyes as the three Slytherins descended back down into the dungeons. First the Cabinet. Then the murder. Then, he would find a way to keep Granger with him. Draco chewed on the inside of his lip. After all, she did say she wanted that too.

Hermione spent the next few days trying to avoid Malfoy. She knew that eventually he would pop up, lurking in an abandoned corridor and talking in that low, commanding voice she just *loved*. Then she'd follow him to some dark corner and let him quiet all the cluttered thoughts in her head.

It was inevitable.

But for right now, she had to study. Sneaking around with Draco had cut into her revision and homework schedule and she should have already been done with her Charms work a day ago and she wasn't even halfway through it. She had never cut it this close before and so Hermione set herself up at a table in the back of the Library where she was least likely to be disturbed.

The candle on the desk was burning low so she knew it must have been hours since she set herself to work. Her eyes were getting tired, but she just needed to write a few more

paragraphs on extension charms and she could call it a night. She had delved deep into her research, knowing she'd need to learn every detail of this for future use.

If the war started and they had to run... She sat her quill down and rubbed her dry eyes.

The chair next to her scraped across the floor. No... She didn't want to have a conversation with Draco right now! She was exhausted and her brain felt like it might run out of her ears if she tried to squeeze anything else from it. Hermione turned to tell him that now wasn't a good time, but stopped when she met sky blue eyes instead of dark stormy ones.

"Hey," Ron said with a small smile. "Can we talk?"

Oh God, she would have preferred Draco right now to Ron. What could he possibly want to talk about this late at night?

She was honestly surprised to see him here. He normally only came to the Library when Hermione dragged him and Harry here for research.

"Uhm, sure."

Ron rubbed his hand through his hair. "We're good, right?"

He let out a long breath. How many times was he going to ask her this? But this time seemed different. Ron was tense, the muscles in his shoulders tight. Anxiety spread through her and Hermione nodded. "Yes, we're fine."

"So you would tell me if something was going on? Something... I mean, you wouldn't..."

Oh dear. "What is this about, Ronald?" Hermione closed her book and turned towards him. She didn't have it in her to try and figure out what he was getting at.

"Lavender said you weren't in your bed the other night."

Freezing panic shot through her quickly followed by searing adrenaline. She could feel her eyes opening wider and the blood rushing into her face.

"I asked Cormac," Ron went on, blue eyes locking onto hers. "He was terrified to even talk about you. Said he had nothing to do with you anymore. So I know it's not him."

Dear Godric. Hermione felt nauseous. "What's not him?" she heard herself ask.

"Don't try and deny it, Hermione. I know you... I know there's someone." His voice held a bitter note in it. "You've changed. You go missing sometimes. No one knows where you are, Ginny, Harry, Neville... You disappear."

"I'm here a lot," Hermione tried.

"All night?"

"That's really none of your business."

"Yes it is," he said firmly. "You're..." Ron pressed his lips together. "You're my friend, Hermione. And I care about you."

He was right. They were friends. And she wasn't really acting like one right now. But she couldn't tell him! Best friend or not, Ron *hated* Draco and he'd hate her too for what she'd

done with him.

"I know you were hurt by what happened between us."

Hermione blinked. Did he think everything was about him? It started off that way, maybe, but now Ron's relationship status had nothing to do with her own. Not that she even really knew what it was. All she knew was she was... with Draco. In some fashion.

"You're not like other girls." He placed his hand over hers. Hermione looked down at it, pale and freckled, a hand she knew so well. She pulled her hands into her lap and picked at her nails a little.

Ron sighed. "There are guys out there who will take advantage of you."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Do you think I can't take care of myself? That I'm dumb enough not to know when a guy just wants—" she stopped short as Draco's face swam to the forefront of her mind. She knew what he wanted, didn't she?

"I don't think you're dumb!" Ron quickly corrected. 'Not at all. Hermione, you're the brightest person I know.' She was tempted to smile. "But you're..."

"What? I'm what, Ron?"

"Sweet." Ron closed his eyes.

Oh... oh God no.

He opened them again and there it was, clear as a blue sky. Draco had been right, in his own way; Ron did have feelings for her.

"There is someone." For some inexplicable reason, she felt the need to defend the shaky arrangement she had with Draco. It really didn't make any sense, but then again, none of this ever had.

The blood drained from Ron's face, making his freckles stand out. She used to want to reach out and touch them, dragging her fingers from dot to dot, but now she wanted nothing more than to not have to look him in the face.

"Oh."

He tried to pull himself back together. This admission obviously shook him and Hermione tried not to cringe too badly. He was still with Lavender for goodness sake, even if it was slowly ending. And her feelings for Draco were growing; growing to a point where she knew they were becoming dangerous, but... she liked it.

Ron cleared his throat. "And you... you like him?"

She bit her lip and nodded, looking back down at the closed book in front of her.

"You were with him. That night." The words sounded hollow, as if he almost didn't believe them.

Hermione turned back towards him, a couple curls fell around her face. "It's none of your business where I was or whom I was with."

"Okay." Ron sat back.

"I mean it." She wanted to drive the point home. Ron was stubborn enough to ambush her with this again if she didn't.

His face turned sour. "I know."

Who was *he* to be upset with her over this? She hadn't thrown it in his face like he had with Lavender. He didn't have to watch her walk around hand in hand or make out with someone else. Although the thought of having Draco's hand wrapped around hers as they walked down the corridor together was one she entertained a second too long before she realized it.

She pulled herself back from her thoughts. Malfoy didn't *do* girlfriends. And even if he did, she'd never make the cut.

"I've never met a girl like you... You're the best I've ever had."

Ron was watching her expectantly. Normally she would try and compensate by over explaining herself to him, but not this time. And especially not about *this*.

"How's Lavender?" Hermione asked, twisting the knife.

"Fine," he grumbled.

"Getting along?" She gave him a wry smile.

Ron glared back at her. "Better than with some people."

"Glad to hear it." She opened her book back up, letting him know she was done discussing this.

"Are you?" His question caught her off guard and Hermione's mouth fell open a little.

She closed it back. "I'm your friend. Why wouldn't I be happy for you?"

Ron tilted his head a little and his copper hair reflected the low light from the candle. "And this guy... he's your *friend* too?"

"We're... It's not like that," she explained and Ron looked at her, confused. "It's not serious."

Ron's clear blue eyes moved over her. "Not serious. Okay," he said and seemed to brighten up a little. Hermione felt a tingle of nerves in her stomach. "Look, Lavender isn't taking the Apparition test on Friday, she doesn't turn 17 until the end of May. Maybe we can walk down to Hogsmeade together?"

"Uhm, sure." Hermione felt strangely obligated to say yes to avoid another fight with him. He had turned his attitude around quickly. Maybe she was just used to Malfoy's moods, but that seemed... odd. Like she had missed something.

"Cool." He grinned at her and stood up. "I'll see you back in the common room."

"Yeah," she smiled a little, brows tightening wondering what all had really just happened as Ron walked down the aisle and away from the back table she was at.

"Be still my bleeding heart," Malfoy drawled and Hermione spun around so fast she was almost dizzy as her curls fanned out around her and then fell over her shoulders. Had he been

there the whole time?

"It's 'beating' not 'bleeding'," she corrected him.

Draco shrugged. "It's a Muggle phrase."

"So why are you using it?" she asked as Draco eyed the chair next to her like there was something nasty on it and then swapped it with another before sitting down.

Hermione rolled her eyes.

Draco checked her over, inspecting her as if he expected to find something foul on her. "I've been asking myself the same thing."

She glared at him. What was this? Get on Hermione's last nerve night? Between the two of them, her face was liable to get permanently stuck this way.

"So... I'm someone?" Draco smirked at her, clearly enjoying himself. Hermione was hating every second.

"Were you spying on me?"

"I'm always spying on you, Granger. Don't you remember the baths? Because I do." He gave her a wolfish grin.

"Eavesdropping is very rude," she sneered. One good thing about Malfoy was she didn't have to try and avoid fighting with him like she did Ron. It too was inevitable.

"You'd know all about that, wouldn't you?" His grey eyes burned like smoke.

"What are you talking about?"

Draco gave her a knowing smile. "Professor Babbling was quite chuffed when she gave me back my latest translations. Said I'm back in top form."

Hermione blushed and glanced up at him from beneath long lashes. He was grinning at her, eyes shining like silver.

"What are you working on?" He leaned over, bringing his body close to hers and Hermione's breath caught in her throat.

"Charms," she mumbled.

"Hmm..." His eyes scanned over the page. "You forgot the bit about the caster being the only one who can detect the extension charm. If it's done correctly."

Hermione looked over her essay and saw that she hadn't added that bit in yet. She still had a few paragraphs to go, she would have got it before the end, but of course Draco was pleased with himself that he had pointed out something she'd missed. Merlin, he was so *annoying*!

"I'm not finished yet!" She would have been done by now if Ron hadn't interrupted her.

"Neither am I," he breathed out, the mint of his breath sweet and crisp. Hermione felt her heart flutter in her chest. He pushed her hair back over her shoulder and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "He thinks you're *sweet*. If only he knew all the dirty things you let me do to you..."

Hermione swallowed. There was an uncomfortable pulsing in between her legs and Draco's fingers were tracing the skin at the collar of her shirt, dipping down to run over her collarbone.

"My filthy little slut." His other hand slid up her skirt and she gasped as he ran his fingers up her thighs. "You want to get fingered in the Library? Hmm?"

He drummed his fingers against her knickers and pulled her earlobe with his teeth. Hermione pressed her lips together and nodded. God, did she ever...

Draco chuckled and slid his hand inside her knickers, quickly finding his way into her. She let out a small whimper as he moved them in and out.

"I'm someone?" he whispered darkly.

She nodded. His thumb circled over her clit a few times and her legs started to go stiff.

"*Just* someone?" His voice was low and deep in her ear. He dragged the tip of his tongue along the shell of it.

"Who am I, kitten?" How he could affect her so quickly she didn't know, but her body was tuned into him and responded to every thrust, every touch.

"Who am I?" he whispered darkly.

"Draco..." She said in a gasping moan as the pleasure started to rise up. Oh God, she was going to come. Here. In the Library. With his hand in between her legs.

Then it was gone.

Hermione gave a small cry as the feeling in her lower stomach withered up.

Draco was chucking, grey eyes gleaming as he leaned back.

"What? Why?" she asked weakly.

"What?" he mocked. "Maybe Weasley can finish you off while you walk to Hogsmeade together," he sneered nastily at her.

Frustration roared inside her at her ruined pleasure and at Draco's audacity to throw that in her face.

"Are you kidding me?" She stared agape at him. "He's my friend. Just a friend!"

"And you're mine," he growled, pulling her face close to his. "And now, you won't forget it."

He shoved her back and stood up, sneering at her again before stalking off.

Hermione sat there for a moment, muscles still wound tight and aching to be released. She stared down at her open book and unfinished essay, heart pounding and hands shaking, but not at all in the way she wanted.

“Excuse me, Professor Babbling, but I need to see Mr. Malfoy. Immediately.” Snape’s toneless voice interrupted the Ancient Runes lecture and the class all turned in their seats to look at Draco who was leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed.

Draco glared at his Godfather and Head of House. He used to quite admire Snape, but now could barely stand the sight of that glory hound. He shoved himself up from his desk but couldn’t help but cast a glance over at Granger who was staring up at him with wide brown eyes.

They hadn’t talked about what happened last weekend and as far as he was concerned they didn’t need to. He said everything he needed to say to her. Spending the night? Didn’t happen. And the little lesson in the Library, well, that was just to show her who was in control. Especially now that he was having to spend his evenings locked up in the Room of Hidden Things.

He had needed to work on the Vanishing Cabinet and had actually made some progress over the last few nights, much to Crabbe and Goyle chagrin. He had to admit, since Granger had asked him to stop drinking, he had been able to focus more on it and in a strange way he had her to thank for the progress he was making. Progress that was taking him away from her in more ways than one. A sick, two sided sword.

Snape held out his arm and Draco threw him a nasty look as he moved into the hall.

He led Draco down into the dungeons to his office. If Snape thought he could intimidate him by pulling him out of class for a talking to and finally get him to break when he was so close to doing it all on his own the old man had another thing coming.

Snape opened his office door and Draco stopped short.

His mother was here.

“Draco,” she let out a sigh of relief and rushed to him, about to hug him when she stopped and pulled her arms back, glancing at Snape and clearing her throat. “Please, come and sit.”

Draco took a seat next to his mother and across from Snape. He looked quickly between them, hoping one of them would give something away so he wouldn’t feel so lost.

His mother slid the gloves he had gotten her for Christmas off and neatly folded them in her lap. “Draco, you’re so pale,” she sounded concerned. He rolled his eyes. ‘You... you don’t look well, darling.’ She turned sharply to Snape. “You were supposed to be looking out for him,” she snapped, all the softness in her voice gone.

Snape was unflustered. “I have offered my assistance to Draco numerous times, Narcissa. And unless you would like me to force feed the boy—”

“I’m not a boy!” Draco snarled. “I’m more of a man than you’ll ever be,” he sneered at Snape.

Snape’s dark eyes glittered. “Be that as it may,” he said slowly, turning back to Narcissa. “I allowed this visit because you said you had important information for him?”

“Yes,” she took a deep breath and then whispered “from... from the Dark Lord.”

Draco’s blood ran cold.

His mother reached out and placed her hand on his knee. "Draco, he wants it done." He looked down and saw her nails were chipped. He had never seen her nails chipped before. Maybe he was not the only one who wasn't taking care of himself properly. "He said if it's not done soon then..." she trailed off.

"I'm almost there," he tried to sound reassuring. "I just need a little more time."

"If it is a matter of such great import and the Dark Lord commands it, then I offer my services again—"

"No!" Draco growled. He wasn't about to let Snape slide in at the last minute and take credit for all the work he'd done.

"Draco, listen to him!" His mother pleaded.

"No!" He stood up. 'I'm going to do this. Me! No one else!' He turned towards Snape, sitting still with his greasy hair framing his face. "I don't want your help. I don't need your help."

"Draco, please!" Narcissa pulled on his robes. "Your father—" Draco turned sharply. "He... He's dying."

Dying. Dying. Dying.

A chill passed through him which had nothing to do with the dank dungeon they were in. He had been wasting time with Granger. He knew it and still he hadn't stopped. He knew the feelings he had for her were growing dangerous and making him sloppy. Falling asleep next to her? She could have seen the mark! Then he'd be dead. And his father would die. And his mother wouldn't last long on her own. He saw the same dark circles under her eyes that his mirror greeted him with every morning.

"I'm almost done. I just need a little more time," he repeated, sounding more like a plea than he intended.

His mother nodded. "If you won't take Severus' help, your aunt Bella has offered hers."

"What?" Draco pulled back from her and she stood up. The top of her head only came to his chin now.

"Bellatrix's help? Does the Dark Lord want the school burned down now?" Snape's sarcasm was not masked.

"She said if you can find a way to get her in, she will duel him, weaken him, and then you can finish the job."

They were discussing murder like it was afternoon tea. Draco felt sick. Death and dying... he was full of it. He felt a tightness in his chest and wanted nothing more than to be out of this room and away from all of them right now. The mark on his arm burned uncomfortably, but it felt like the only heat left in his body.

"I don't need anyone's help!" he snarled. "He gave *me* this task. Me alone! So the next person who *offers* to help will have to answer to *him!*"

Narcissa took a step back. Snape stood up. Draco glared at both of them then turned on his heel, and stormed out of the office.

Ron was taking the long way through the castle as they patrolled. So much had happened over the last two days— she had passed her apparition test, Ron had *just* failed, Harry got the memory from Slughorn had another lesson with Dumbledore, and Lavender finally had broken up with Ron.

She had seen the two of them coming out of the boys dorm when Harry was under the invisibility cloak and it had been the twig that broke the hippogriff's back because she started shouting, crying, and firing all sorts of accusations at Ron about how he never really loved her and there had always been something else going on. Eventually she had worn herself out and told him it was over.

Hermione couldn't help but feel a little pleased that their relationship was over seeing as it had been a roadblock in her and Ron's friendship and anyways Ron seemed much happier now that it was over. There of course had been a lot of late night crying and Hermione did feel for Lavender since she obviously cared about Ron, but she reminded herself that their relationship had not been the healthiest for either of them and in the long run, better ended than in the strange middle ground they had been occupying the last month or so.

Ron chatted happily, talking about retaking the test with Harry in July and how it didn't really matter if he could apparate just yet because he still had his broom and Harry couldn't either so it wasn't so bad after all. Cheerful Ron was her favorite Ron and Hermione found herself smiling and enjoying his company more than she had in weeks.

Their conversation in the Library still hung between them, but Hermione was glad that he hadn't brought it up before the test on Friday as it would have surely distracted her and she had enough thoughts bouncing around up there. She did notice Ron keeping an eye on every guy that congratulated her when she passed and he made sure to give her an extra long hug, holding her tightly until she gently pushed him away.

"Hermione," Ron said as they breached the top of their last staircase.

"Yes?" She stopped and looked at him.

"How's your... thing going?" He looked uncomfortable, but was that a hopeful twinkle in his eye?

Hermione took a deep breath. She knew his silence was too good to last. "I meant it when I said it wasn't your business, Ron."

"I know, I know," he smiled a little at her, "but I want it to be."

Hermione's heart jumped a little. Months ago she would have been thrilled to have Ron say something like that, but now... Things were weird with Malfoy, but they were there, rooted in. The more she had thought about it, the more she had to say that they had something real between them. She had asked him not to drink and he had stopped, she had asked him not to call her Mudblood and he had stopped, she had asked him not to see other girls and he had stopped. And she had done everything he had asked too.

Hermione blushed. They had something. It was crazy and wild and unexpected, but it was theirs. What was Draco to her? Not a boyfriend, not even a friend really. Lover was too endearing of a term and partner seemed... formal in a way they weren't. He was her... someone. But maybe not *just* someone.

"I don't want to lose you again." Ron's soft voice stirred her from her thoughts. He was staring down at her, crystal blue eyes clear and open. Nothing like Malfoy's hidden hazy greys she had stared into so often hoping to catch a glimpse of what was pouring out of Ron's right now.

"Ron..." Hermione started softly. She didn't want to lose him either, but she didn't want to make him think she still felt like she had in the past. He was right, she had changed.

"Yeah?" His voice was low and husky. He was closer to her now, past the distance they normally kept as friends and in the vicinity that Draco normally occupied.

Hermione gave him a weak sympathetic smile. "I... I can't."

"Why not?" His blue eyes twinkled and his lips pulled in a little smile. "You're not serious with whoever it is and... I am. I'm serious."

Oh good Godric. Hermione was twisting tightly, anxiety building up in her. Ron was nice and a good guy, despite how he sometimes acted, he never really intended to hurt anyone. And Malfoy did. Malfoy had hurt Cormac *on purpose*. Malfoy had hurt *her* on purpose.

"Let me show you."

Ron leaned down to her. She could see his lips parting, opening his mouth. Warm breath spread across her face—

Hermione pulled back, taking a step back from him and letting the night air fill the distance she hadn't noticed he had closed.

She touched her lips where Ron's had almost just been. It felt wrong. Like she had almost crossed some invisible line. Ron looked confused then a dark troubling expression sank over his freckled face.

"Oh."

"I-I'm sorry," Hermione said weakly. "I—"

A door shut loudly behind them and Hermione looked over her shoulder.

Oh no...

Oh Godric, please no.

Malfoy was glowering at the pair of them. They had taken the long way through the castle, walking up flights of stairs to the seventh floor landing. She had lost track, she hadn't even stopped to think he might be up here.

His grey eyes were as hard as iron and his face pale with rage. His wand was in his hand and the dark wood looked every inch like the weapon she knew he could wield it as.

"Dra— Malfoy." Hermione's voice was shaking.

“What are you doing up here?” Ron said nastily. “You’re not a Prefect anymore.”

Oh God, Ron, stop talking!

“You don’t know what I am,” Malfoy growled and lifted his brows up from his cold eyes. “But you’re about to find out.”

Hermione’s hands were trembling at her side. Malfoy could curse him or beat him like he did Cormac. Goodness, he looked *furios!* He looked... he looked like he could be what Harry had been claiming for months.

Malfoy was taking long strides towards them.

“Having fun, Granger?” His deadly stare was now focused on her. He must have seen her pull away, right? She knew how possessive he was, but he had to know that she wouldn’t have kissed Ron. He knew how she felt, right?

“What’s he taste like, huh?” His voice was cold and cruel, cutting into her. “Let me guess... *Lavender.*”

“Fuck off, Malfoy or I’ll report you to for being up here. You belong down in the dungeons,” Ron said harshly.

Hermione was frozen under Malfoy’s icy eyes. Oh God, he thought Ron had kissed her! He glared at her a moment longer then turned them to Ron.

“Go ahead. Run and tell. I’d rather be expelled than to watch the two of you swap spit a second longer.”

Ron bristled. “What are you even doing up here?”

The Room of Requirement; she knew it well now. Draco was doing something in it when he wasn’t with her, that much was clear. Ron was sure to tell Harry and would probably join him on his crusade to prove Malfoy was a Death Eater and—

“You know I think you Blood Traitors might be even worse than the Mudbloods,” Draco commented casually, his ire hidden just under the surface. Ron’s ears flushed bright red. ‘She can’t help what she is,’ he threw Hermione a nasty look, “but you? You *chose* this.”

Ron lifted his wand.

“Ron, don’t!” Hermione cried out and pulled on his arm. “You can’t!”

“You heard him!”

“You’re a Prefect!” she pleaded. “You can’t throw curses in a corridor!”

Ron was struggling with himself for a moment while Malfoy sneered nastily at him, wand still in hand, but thankfully still at his side.

“You’re right, Hermione.” She felt Draco tense at the sound of Ron saying her name. “I don’t need to do this. McGonagall can deal with him. Let’s go.”

Hermione was rooted to the spot. She didn’t want Draco to get in trouble and McGonagall was strict about students being out of bed after hours, especially with the new security

measures in place, but at the same time she couldn't imagine a better outcome when Ron and Draco were this close to one another.

"Ron, you go," Hermione said firmly. "I'll finish the patrol alone."

"What? I'm not leaving you up here with him."

"I'm not staying." Hermione spun back around as Draco spoke. "I'm done here." He glared at her and something inside her wilted.

"Hermione," Ron insisted.

"Just... go. Go!" She said a little louder. "One of us has to finish the patrol and the other has to go to McGonagall. Go!"

Ron gave Malfoy one last look and then headed back down the stairs. Once his footsteps drifted away Hermione turned, stomach in knots back to Malfoy.

"Draco—"

"You fucking liar."

"Please—"

"Don't fucking touch me!" He shouted as Hermione reached for him. The coldness was emanating off of him, filling the air with a sickening freeze. "Get the fuck in there." He pointed a shaking finger at the door he had just come through.

Hermione did as she was told, moving forward on stiff legs. The Room of Requirement looked different than she had ever seen it before. Large stacks of countless objects soared into a high ceiling. Small winding paths were cut through them leading in a myriad of different directions. What was this place?

The door closed behind her and she turned around to see Malfoy standing there, glowering at her with a cold fury on his face.

"We can talk about this but you have to calm down," she started.

"Calm down?!" he shouted. "*Calm down?!?*"

"I didn't kiss him," Hermione tried to explain.

"No you just let *him* kiss *you*," he snarled then scoffed. "You don't get it—"

From his perspective she could see how that's what he thought he saw. But she had stopped him! He should be happy about that, why was he upset with her?!

"No, I don't!" she argued back. It wasn't fair for him to get mad at her without hearing her out. Her Gryffindor pride was firing up and boiling her resentment at him. He was jumping to conclusions and not listening to her. Did he really think she'd do something like that? He hadn't even bothered to look at her the last two days and now he was mad because someone else had when she clearly didn't even want it?

Draco glared down at her. "I'd bite that lip for talking back to me like that if it didn't have *Weasley* all over it."

He was wrong. So wrong! And he wasn't letting her prove herself right.

"You had no problem kissing me after Cormac!"

Draco's grey eyes stormed and Hermione felt a sudden nervous jolt run through her. Oh no...

"The *fuck* did you just say?" His voice was soft and cold. She would have preferred he yelled to this icy anger.

Hermione balked. No good could come of this. She had let her temper get the better of her; damn Gryffindor pride wouldn't let her take this lying down. Not that she should, but maybe she shouldn't have thrown Cormac in Draco's face. Especially when she just realized that he hadn't known about their little make out session under the mistletoe.

"When was this?" The ice from Draco's tone seeped into her bloodstream, turning her cold.

"Before."

"Before what, Granger?" he growled. "Before me?"

"Yes. Well, no. Not exactly." She wasn't explaining this very well, but that was partly due to the fact that she didn't want to explain this at all. It hadn't meant anything and honestly, she hadn't thought about it in months and it had never crossed her mind to mention it to him.

"Tell me the fucking truth right now or I swear on Salazar's watery grave, I'll break into your mind and *take it*."

His wand was in his hand. She had to remember his wand was already in his hand and if she even tried to go for hers he could curse her before she got it out. He might not be a Death Eater, but that didn't stop him from being dangerous. And if he was serious and dove into her mind, he'd find all her thoughts about him and her and all the deep feelings she never wanted him to find out.

"Slughorn's party," she breathed out, voice shaking. "He kissed me at Slughorn's party."

Draco's eyes burned like ash-covered coals. His grey tinged skin paled with rage and he seemed to be having a difficult time breathing. She was scared. For the first time, she was really scared of him. He loomed over her, bearing down and not letting his shining silver eyes leave hers. Hermione was trapped in his gaze, hypnotized by the smoking grey there.

"I fucking broke that bastard's hand for touching you. If I would have known he kissed you... And *you*!" He looked at her with contempt. Like he used to. When she was just a Mudblood to him.

She couldn't take this. She didn't like the way he was looking at her and she didn't like the way she felt right now. Guilty. Hermione felt guilty. It hadn't meant anything to her, but she should have considered that it might have meant something to Draco. She had spoken in anger and dug herself deeper into this hole than she already was and Draco had always taken the low road.

She didn't know how to get out of this. He didn't want to listen to her right now, he was too upset and it seemed like he was barely keeping himself under control from his shaking

hands and heavy breaths. If she hadn't brought up Cormac she might have been able to talk to him about Ron, but no longer. It felt like the earth was shattering underneath her. He was so angry. At her. And it was her fault.

She didn't want to lose him over this, not at all. It was a fact. And Hermione had always been good with facts, memorizing them, tucking them away in her head, ready to pull out at a moment's notice and this fact was no different. Hermione cared for Draco. Maybe more than she had ever realized before.

"Draco, stop," Hermione whined. "You... you just need to calm down and we can talk about this. You don't want to say anything you don't mean."

"Oh I mean it." He took a heavy step towards her, bringing his body as close to hers as he could without touching her. "I mean every goddamn word when I say I'm fucking *done* with you."

Her heart stopped beating. Her arms went numb. The blood rushed from her head and she had no idea how she was still standing upright right now. He turned and pulled the door open, nearly yanking it from its hinges before slamming it so hard that it bounced back open again.

But it was too late. Draco was gone.

19. nineteen

Soundtrack— “Leave like that” by SYML ft. Jean Champion and “Maniac” by Phoebe Green

Chapter 19

“She fucking cheated on me!” Draco slammed his closed fists into the wall of stalls, the faded green paint chipping and sticking to his hands.

Myrtle was floating a few feet away, hovering nervously up and down. She drifted to the side, twirling one of her pigtails around her finger.

“I thought she wasn’t your girlfriend.”

Draco rounded on her. “She’s not. I’m fucking done with that bitch,” he snarled. Cold corrosion was creeping deep into him. Draco could hardly see straight. He felt like his blood was about to burst through his skin. He felt like puking. He couldn’t get the image of that fucking piece of shit Blood Traitor on *his girl* out of his head.

“But... she was?” Myrtle asked in a small voice.

“Haven’t you been listening?! Or are you deaf as well as dead?!” He glared at her, grey eyes shooting daggers into her glazed ones. “How could I ever love a dirty fucking Mudblood like her?!”

She blinked her glassy eyes behind her stupid fucking frames, face dropping with disappointment. “Mudblood?” she gasped. “You... you love her?”

He threw his fist into the side of the stall and the wood cracked and splintered. Hot rushing pain shot up his arm. *Fuck*.

He couldn’t breathe. It was happening again. His chest felt tight, his heart beat too fast. Muscles contracted and wouldn’t relax, constricting painfully. He couldn’t stop seeing Weasley leaning in closer and closer and closer.

Then pretty boy McLaggen replaced him. Granger in her pretty pink dress showing off her tits and McLaggen’s fucking hands on them. Goddamn it! He threw his fist into the broken wood again and felt it bite into his skin. His heart was beating so hard it was going to burst.

“I don’t—” he hit the ruined wood again. “*Love—*” and again. “*HER!*”

Draco sunk to the floor, gasping, unable to hold himself up anymore. Myrtle drifted slightly closer, but kept her distance. He pressed his hands onto the cold stone floor, arms shaking uncontrollably as he tried to suck air into his broken chest.

“Fuck her.” His voice broke. “*Fuck her.*”

Myrtle settled her ghostly body next to his. “Are you okay?”

He closed his eyes, burning with the images of Krum spinning her around, McLaggen feeling her up, and Weasley leaning closer and closer. She was his. His alone. No one else could have her. She. Was. His.

“Get the fuck away from me,” he growled.

Myrtle reached out a transparent hand and placed it on his bloodied one. It should have been cold, but it was the same temperature as his.

“Don’t fucking touch me, you dead bitch!” Draco shouted, ripping his hand away from her.

She pulled back, floating up and away from him. He heard her snuffle before she dove into a toilet, wailing as she flushed herself down the pipes.

Water splashed onto the floor, soaking his knees and running over his hands. His blood trailed away in it as it pushed farther and farther out. He was still shaking as he made it back to his feet.

Draco forced himself to take a step, then another. He couldn’t take this. He had let that filthy little cunt fuck him up when he had a goddamn job to do for the Dark Lord. He was going to die. He was going to fail and then he was going to die. Because of her. It was all because of her.

He walked out of the bathroom, dripping water and blood behind him and down the stairs to the dungeons.

“Fucking Mudblood bitch,” he muttered as he wrenched his trunk open, pulling out clothes and his father’s walking stick, tossing them to ground. He shoved his bloody hand into the bottom of his trunk and it closed on the cool glass. “I’ll fucking show her,” he growled and pulled the cork out of the bottle.

Draco chugged down as much as he could before he spluttered and coughed. Shit, he might puke. No... no he was keeping it down. Good. He only had the one bottle for now and he needed every drop inside it.

He was going to get stone cold drunk and *make* himself forget all about Granger and her little sweet smile and big doe eyes. After that, he was going to fix that piece of shit Cabinet and kill Dumbledore so he could get the fuck out of here and far, *far* away from her.

“Draco, what the fuck?” Blaise said from the doorway.

Draco swayed as he turned around, leaning on the dark wooden frame of his bed.

“Mate, you’re a fucking wreck!” Blaise’s dark eyes moved over him, brows knitted together in concern. His clothes were soaked with water, blood smeared over his hand and a bottle in the other.

Draco laughed. There was no joy and levity in it; it was a cold and mirthless laugh. “I’m going to fuck her.”

Blaise’s brows shot up. “Who? Draco, who the hell are you talking about?”

“Granger,” he growled and took a shaky step forward. Blaise eyed him nervously. “I’m going to fuck that bitch up.”

Hermione sat still, looking down at lunch as everyone else chatted happily with their friends around her. She was doing her best to keep to her routine. The routine gave her something to do, someplace to be because she couldn't stop the memories of Draco looming over her, speaking those words over and over.

*"I'm fucking **done** with you."*

Her chest hurt. She had known, all along, that one day this would happen. It would be over. But she never thought it would be like this. Not because of... Well it wasn't really her fault. It had been wrong of her to tell him about Cormac like that, but it was so long ago and they had barely been anything then. It had been that night that changed things. And Ron...

She glanced down the Gryffindor table to where he was sitting with Harry and Neville. He didn't look as cheerful as he normally did this morning, but he looked better than she did.

She had tried her best to swallow it down, not to let it bother her. Draco— no, Malfoy had slithered in deeper than she had realized. It had been hard, seeing Ron with someone else before, but it hadn't been like this. Maybe because she and Ron had never had anything and she and Draco— *Malfoy* had. Or maybe it was because she cared about him more than she ever had Ron.

Her hands felt cold despite the May heat and she scanned the paper in front of her. The front page was full of names of people who had been attacked or were reported missing and she felt the coldness move farther in. Things were getting bad. Fast. It was alarming how quickly things were devolving and she glanced back over at her friends, worried for them, Harry most of all.

She hadn't had many friends before she came to Hogwarts and she had been thrilled when Harry and Ron had adopted her, for lack of a better term. But that's what it felt like. They were their own little family here and she was scared for what the future held for them. Especially because she was falling for Draco.

The feelings she had tried to explain away were now all too real and she was paying dearly for ignoring them for so long. It wasn't a little crush or teenage lust that she felt for him. This was real. This was... she didn't even want to think the word. Not now. Now that it was over.

"I like you."

"I've never met a girl like you."

"You don't know what you are to me."

It had been real. Everything she had told herself— that it was just what he needed to hear or a part of the game or... whatever excuses she had made up in her mind to justify being with him, doing those things; it had all been real. And it had been real for him too.

The ache in her chest intensified.

If it had just been physical he wouldn't have reacted like he did. Granted the way he reacted was completely ridiculous. Her back had been to him and maybe all he saw was Ron leaning down, but either way, he should have listened to her! She tried to tell him, she tried...

Hermione sighed and sat her paper down. She couldn't focus and this subject matter wasn't exactly reassuring either.

She just kept seeing the anger and hurt in his stormy eyes. She didn't like that he had yelled at her. She didn't like that he had accused her of... well, not being unfaithful because they weren't really together, but how could he think that she would do something like that? She had told him she liked him. She had never told a boy she liked him before. It had meant something to her. *He* meant something to her.

"You're not eating?" Ginny asked, light brown eyes clouded with worry. "Hermione, you didn't eat breakfast either. What's going on?"

She just shook her head. "I don't have much of an appetite today." She folded the paper up and dropped her hands to her lap. Normally she would be picking at her nails, but... today she just didn't have the energy for it. She'd barely slept last night. At least she hadn't had one of her nightmares. Would the Death Eater in her dreams have shouted at her too?

Draco hadn't been in classes this morning and she didn't know if that made it worse or not. What would it be like when she finally saw him again? Saw his white blond hair, his piercing grey eyes. Would he even look at her? She couldn't imagine going back to the way things used to be between them. Not being able to see him, talk to him...

What was he doing now? Was he holed up somewhere with another girl? Oh God, the thought made her sick. Her eyes moved without her consent and she looked over to the Slytherin table across the hall. A quick scan let her know that his white blond hair was not there, but surprisingly she did meet a dark gaze.

Blaise Zabini was watching her carefully, deep thoughts in his dark eyes. He seemed to be trying to figure something out and he didn't flinch when her eyes landed on his. Her lips parted slightly as a thought occurred to her; Zabini was Malfoy's friend. Well, as close to a friend as he got. And the way he was watching her... did he know?

Zabini dropped his eyes back to his food and she could see his cunning mind working on something. If he didn't know before, she was almost sure he knew *something* now. He had never looked her way before, in fact, he mostly pretended like she didn't exist. The only thing that had changed was her relationship with Draco.

Pansy's bark-like laugh sounded sharply as Nott fed her a chip, smiling broadly. *At least he's not with her.* But there were dozens of girls he could be with. Or he could be passed out drunk. He had only stopped drinking because she had asked him to and before that he had been well on his way to making the habit a compulsion.

"What's going on with you?" Ginny asked quietly. "You're never this quiet. Is it... Ron?"

Hermione's head turned in her direction at the thought of him. Ron. Even though he had said he was done, would he still go after Ron? It wasn't like Draco— Malfoy to be forgiving and he still thought she had kissed him. *Oh God, Ron!*

Quickly she looked back down the table, as if she thought the stormy sky was going to open him up and strike him down. No, he was fine, just sitting there as Neville brushed some crumbs off himself and waved goodbye to him and Harry. Harry bent his head low with Ron and pulled out the Map.

The Map!

Hermione stood up quickly.

"Where are you going?" Ginny called out but she ignored her.

Hermione sat down beside Harry. "Are you looking for Malfoy?" she asked and was surprised at how raspy her voice sounded from disuse.

"Uh, yeah," Harry said, clearly surprised that she was interested and not berating him for it.

"Where is he?" she demanded.

Harry unfolded the Map under the table and she bent forward, searching for a black dot labeled Draco Malfoy.

"He's in his dorm," Harry explained. "Been there all morning."

Hermione took a deep breath. He was alone. At least he was alone. But alone in bed? He must have been drinking. Concern strummed her heartstrings and she glanced up, meeting Zabini's charcoal eyes again.

"Hermione—" Ron started.

"I have to go." She stood up.

"Wait, can we—" he grabbed her hand and she quickly jerked it away from him.

"Stop, Ron!" she shouted. A few heads turned in their direction. Ron's blue eyes widened. "Just... stop." She shook her head, messy curls falling in her face. For some reason she met Lavender's piercing eyes and quickly looked away. She didn't have time to deal with whatever accusation her dorm mate would throw at her. Hermione grabbed her bag and headed out of the Great Hall.

"Hermione!" Ginny was running after her.

She took another large breath and turned around. "Ginny, I really don't—"

"I just want to make sure you're okay. I get that whatever it is you aren't ready to talk about it. But, I'm here when you are. If it's Ron or it's not, it doesn't matter. I'm *your* friend. I'm here for you."

She felt like falling into Ginny's arms right there in the Entrance Hall and telling her everything. Draco, what they'd done, how she felt... everything. It was a lot to handle on her own and now that Draco wasn't there for her... but he had never been her friend. Not like Ginny.

She won't be your friend once you tell her.

Hermione closed her mouth and blinked a few times, looking into the loving, caring eyes of Ginny Weasley. "I'm fine," she lied.

"Hermione, I know you're not."

"I... I just have t—" Ron appeared, walking out the Great Hall, looking around. His blue eyes landed on her. "I have to go."

Hermione turned and headed up the large marble staircase. Behind her she heard Ginny start to fuss loudly at Ron who was yelling back.

"I didn't do anything!"

"You obviously did! She's clearly upset over something!"

Hermione leaned against a suit of armor. Now she was causing problems in the Weasley family. When would this end?

Then the voice in her head sounded again. *Last night. It ended last night.*

"Get. Up."

Snape was standing next to Draco's bed and he lazily lifted his head off of the pillow and looked up with bleary, bloodshot eyes.

"Now."

He let his head fall back into the soft pillow. He knew eventually he would have to rise from his self imposed exile and face the world above, but he was hung over as *fuck* and today was not the day for it.

"I will drag you from his bed if I have to."

Draco opened his eyes only far enough to glare at his Godfather. "I'd like to see you try," he sneered.

Snape raised one brow. "You have a job to do, Draco. Part of that job is maintaining your position as a Hogwarts student. Students," he pulled the covers back and Draco groaned. "Go to class."

"I told you, I'm almost done." Draco seethed.

Snape grabbed his arm, digging his fingers into the mark making it flare to life with pain. Draco cried out, his arm on fire, his head pounding and his stomach churning with the liquor still left in it.

Snape jerked him up. "You reek of alcohol," he snarled. "If your father could see you now..."

"Well he can't!" Draco shouted, causing his head to throb. "He's in a prison cell, *dying*."

Snape's black eyes narrowed. "And you're acting like a spoilt little boy. Now get up!"

Draco spilled unceremoniously onto the floor in a tangle of sheets. He pushed himself up, scowling darkly. He opened his mouth to tell Snape to go fuck himself when a spill of vomit came out instead.

Snape jumped out of the way, cursing and swearing. "You're a louche, indolent, man-child who will end up getting us both killed if you do not get yourself together!"

Draco heaved in breath, tasting the foulness that he had brought forth. “You think I give a shit about you?”

Snape’s lip curled. “No. No, Draco, I do not. But I do think you still care for your mother and if your own impending doom is not enough to move you, know that the Dark Lord’s anger knows no bounds.”

Draco leaned back against the side of the bed. Snape was right. He couldn’t spend the rest of the year locked up in here hoping to drink Granger away. Fuck... why had he pushed her away in the first place?

It hadn’t even been a full day and he already couldn’t stand the thought of facing another one without her. He couldn’t picture his life without her now. He needed her. Needed her more than the whisky he was trying so hard to replace her with. He lov— No. He was still drunk. Once he sobered up some these *feelings* would be set right. It was just the liquor talking.

Snape moved to grab him again and Draco jerked his arm away. “I’m getting up,” he grumbled.

Snape looked down disapprovingly at him. “Clean yourself up. Get dressed. And get to class, Draco.”

Hermione finally gave in at dinner and ate a few forkfuls of peas and half a glass of pumpkin juice when she heard his name being called on the other side of the Hall. Nott was waving him over with open arms and laughing loudly, saying something that sounded like, “Finally made it out of bed!” before Draco slumped into a seat next to him.

She couldn’t stop staring. His clothes were finely pressed, but that was the only thing on him that looked put together. His white blond hair was still wet from a shower and he looked even paler than usual. He threw Theo an empty, flat smile and took a long drink straight from the flagon of pumpkin juice on the table.

Well, at least he seemed to feel just as bad as she did. A small part of her thought he deserved it. If he would have just listened to her then none of this would have happened. She would have calmly told him that there was nothing going on between her and Ron and that he hadn’t kissed her. That she had stopped it. Because— because she liked him. *Really* liked him.

Oh, Hermione, what have you gotten yourself into?

He leaned over and said something to Crabbe whose expression fell, but he nodded. She wasn’t sure, but it looked like Malfoy slipped him something under the table. Gold? What was he paying Crabbe for?

Oh no... Ron.

Was that what he had done to Cormac? Paid someone like Crabbe or Goyle to beat him up? That was it. He had admitting to breaking Cormac’s hand, but remained silent on the how he ended up so bad off that he had to go to the hospital wing. She might not be happy with Ron, but she wasn’t going to let anything happen to him. She had to set this right. She

forced down another mouthful of peas and opened up her Transfiguration book so no one would bother her while she snuck little glances at him from around Neville to see when Malfoy was done.

He stayed in the Great Hall until almost everyone else had left. Nott and Pansy had headed out, but Crabbe and Goyle were still eating when he stood up with Zabini and started making their way out of the Hall. Hermione snapped her book shut and shoved it back in her bag before quickly following them.

She didn't like the fact that Zabini was with him, but if they were done then Draco could just make up some excuse as to why he was talking to her. He'd probably said plenty of awful things about her to Zabini before, this wouldn't be any different. But she couldn't help but have a small glimmer of hope that Draco might feel differently once he knew the truth.

"Malfoy!" Thank Godric she remembered to call him Malfoy this time. Hermione was a higher up on the stairs when he and Zabini turned back towards her.

Draco's eyes widened ever so slightly and his brows lifted millimeters up. That was the only indication that she had that he even recognized her. She glanced over at Zabini who was looking between the two of them, dark eyes calculating and lips pressed thinly together.

Hermione stopped a few steps up from him and took a breath. "Can I speak with you?" It felt so strange to address him like this, as if they were strangers.

Draco didn't say anything for a few uncomfortable seconds and then he leaned over to Zabini and muttered, "Set it up. This won't take long."

Zabini nodded and eyed Hermione again before descending down the stairs. Draco waited then turned back to her, grey eyes unreadable except for the small twitch in the left one. He folded his arms over his chest.

She realized she hadn't been breathing and started to feel lightheaded. Or maybe that was just because she was here with him again. It seemed impossible that this was the same person who had flown her into the Forest and set up the chaise in the Room of Requirement. He was so cold...

Malfoy was staring at her with that emotionless expression on his face. She wished she knew what he was thinking, but on second thought maybe it was better that she didn't.

He needed to know what she was thinking though. That's why she was here. "He didn't kiss me," she blurted out. "I know what it must have looked like, but he didn't kiss me. I stopped him."

Draco's eye twitched again.

"I wouldn't have let him. Draco, I—" she stepped down another stair and paused. "I wouldn't do that to you."

She wished he would say something. Anything. Well, maybe not anything.

"Look, I know you hate me now—"

"Never stopped." His eyes were as hard as iron.

Hermione's mouth dropped open. "Yes," she blinked a few times. 'I know.' This wasn't going at all the way she wanted. "Draco, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for telling you about Cormac like that, but the only reason I didn't tell you before was because it didn't mean anything to me. It wasn't... it wasn't like... well you know."

She glanced up at him and he was still staring at her with those cold grey eyes. This was stupid. She was stupid for trying to talk to him. Malfoy was stubborn and selfish. He wasn't going to give an inch even if it meant he got her back. He didn't even want her anymore.

"Nothing happened. I swear." He still gave nothing away. Hermione bit her lip. "So you won't touch him?"

Draco's lip curled. "I'm not touching another filthy Gryffindor for as long as I live."

The wounded animal in her chest yelped, then growled. "I understand." She stood up a little straighter. "So you can call off Crabbe and tell Zabini he doesn't need to set anything up." She let her frustration ring clear in her voice, even if it was a little higher than normal.

Draco blinked, making the stone expression on his face waiver for a moment before he leaned his face in close to hers. Hermione sucked in a quick breath and caught a whiff of his mint and parchment scent. "You don't know what you're talking about." His eyes bore into hers and Hermione stopped breathing. "And curiosity killed the cat, *kitten*," he sneered at her and turned, taking heavy steps down below.

Sweat was beaded on his forehead as he meticulously twisted his wand inside the Cabinet. Hours upon hours he had spent in here over the past few days. He tried to fill any down time with chess games with Blaise, but his *friend* frowned on his drinking. And he asked too many questions about his 'mystery girl' telling him to fix it already because he was an asshole without her.

Draco did his best to ignore him just like he was trying to ignore Granger. But as always, it was impossible. It would have been easier to try and block out the sun than keep himself from noticing every little thing about her. Granger kept to herself, and away from Weasley. He was happy about that, but she was sad. And he had done that.

He had worked so hard to earn those few little smiles from her and in one night ruined any chance he had at seeing them again. He had tried to drink her away, but doused in the depths of a bottle all he could think about was how he had made the only thing that was worth watching the sun come up go away. All that helped was drinking and even that didn't help much.

Borgin had kept him well supplied in Ogden's and he was careful not to drink too much while he was working lest he damage the Cabinet further. Just enough to get him by.

Once he stopped working however... *Click*.

Draco blinked and exhaled sharply. He did it. He had done it. It... He pulled his wand back from the dark recesses of the Cabinet and opened the cage next to him. A yellow canary sat in there and gently he wrapped his hand around it. The fragile bird chirped loudly and batted one wing against his fingers, trying to get free. He placed it in the Cabinet and closed the door.

Closing his eyes he whispered, “*Harmonia Nectere Passus*,” and the chirping stopped.

He opened the Cabinet and... it was empty. His blood pumped a little faster as he closed it back. After a moment he opened it back up and... Holy fucking Salazar.

A single pale yellow feather sat there, shifting slightly with the movement of the air around it.

It worked.

It fucking worked.

Animate objects could pass through.

Draco smoky eyes opened wide and his lungs emptied of air. He picked up the little feather and held it up.

It wasn't completely ready yet, but it was on its way. Magical objects were harder to pass through than mundane ones and simple animals were easier than a human would be. There was still work to be done before he could use this as his escape, but... he was close. Very close.

He ripped a piece of parchment and quickly scrawled a note, folding it and writing his aunt's name on it. Sealing it with his Malfoy crest ring, he knew Borgin was smart enough not to peek inside. He placed it in there and picked up the empty bottle at his feet and placed it next to the note along with a small stack of silver coins.

Closing the door he murmured the incantation again and waited a few moments before opening the Cabinet again.

His father would be allowed to come home. His mother would cry with joy. His Lord would be thrilled with him, praising him for a job well done. All he had to do was... was kill a man.

Draco grabbed the replacement bottle out of the cabinet and opened it. He stared at it for a moment before turning it up and taking a quick swing of it. It burned. God, did it burn.

Fuck, he had missed this. He missed... he missed her. He couldn't pretend he didn't and no matter how much he drank he couldn't stop the image of her eyes burning into his as she came unraveled underneath him out of his head.

He knew he had a temper and she swore nothing happened. He replayed that night so many times— Weasley leaning in close to her and then... she had stepped back. Granger had stepped back.

But he had just been so... so *angry* that he hadn't even bothered to register that Granger had stopped it. And McLaggen... Merlin, how could he be mad at her about that when as soon as she had left he had gone straight to Pansy and made her suck him off?

Fuck. Blaise was right. He was an asshole.

But she was a bitch too. She could have fucking told him. Or at least not told him like that. But the bitch had beaten him to the punch and apologized for that already. Merlin fuck, if he would have known McLaggen had his fucking hands on her he wouldn't have just broken

one, he would have fucking cursed it off. One finger at a time. But she would have been even more upset over that. He rolled his shoulders and took another drink.

And Weasley? Well... that Blood Traitor already had it coming. It was a shame the poison hadn't finished the job. At least then he wouldn't have worry about that grimy ginger trying to move in on *his* girl. Weasley wasn't his intended target, but Draco didn't mind that piece of shit being a casualty either. He scowled darkly. He wanted to at least *crucio* him a couple of times and then when he was prostrate on the floor grab Granger and remind her who she really belonged to.

Draco tipped the bottle back again.

Him. She belonged to him.

The whisky was hitting his brain now and he blinked heavily, trying to make his vision focus. Granger... he wanted her. So fucking bad.

It had taken everything in him, every fucking ounce of self-control, every mental block, to not pull her down those stairs with him and right into his bed. Fuck he hated her, he... no. He didn't hate her. He hated that he didn't hate her. He hated how he felt about her, that he might even— *Stop. You're too drunk to think about this right now.*

But, he wasn't too drunk to act on those thoughts. And now that he was close to repairing the Cabinet he didn't have much time left.

He thought he could just leave her behind, but he couldn't. Fuck, he couldn't. He couldn't even stop thinking about her. Draco leaned against the Cabinet for a moment and gathered himself. He glanced up at it, dark and towering. Would he be able to leave her behind when the time came?

He swallowed another mouthful and set his mind. The time hadn't come yet and neither had he. Finding his balance, Draco moved forward. He knew a few of her haunts, he'd check those first. And if he couldn't find her... well, he had the rest of the bottle for that.

Hermione wrung out her hair with a soft white towel and then wrapped it around herself. The past few days without Draco had been some of the hardest she'd known since coming to Hogwarts. But she hadn't cried. She was proud of herself for that fact alone. She had promised herself that she wouldn't be another one of those girls and so far she wasn't. Although each day was a challenge not to.

The night after following him into the stairwell had been the hardest so far. She laid in her bed, eyes wide and open and warring with herself over her feelings. She had done everything she could to make it right, at least for her part in this. She had explained to him what happened, told him how she felt, and tried to protect Ron.

A reasonable, rational person might have listened, but that wasn't Draco. Draco was obstinate and always wanted everything his way. She had let her melancholy roll through her, but now felt... angry. She was mad at him. Mad for being too much of a coward to admit he was wrong. Mad for being able to shut off his feelings when hers were roaring. Mad that he seemed content drinking away his problems instead of being a man and talking to her.

God, no one got to her like he did. No one.

And she knew why, because no one made her feel anything as much as he did.

Why? Why did it have to be him? Of all people, why did she have to fall for Draco Malfoy? The air was cooler now that she was out of the bath and Hermione adjusted the towel over her and pressed her arms in closely to her sides as her body tried to heat back up.

At least she still had her routine to cling to. She had already finished all her coursework that had been assigned this week, working late on it to try and distract herself from thoughts she shouldn't be having. But tonight Harry, Ron, and Ginny were all at practice and she with no homework to keep her busy, Hermione had taken the evening to soak away her troubles in the Prefect's bath.

It hadn't really worked. The warm water did soothe her sore muscles from crouching over tables, furiously writing out essay after essay, but it had done nothing for the hurt in her heart. She just couldn't stop thinking about him.

"You're a bloody curse! I can't get you out of my head, can't think, can't fucking breathe!"

She took a deep breath and her heart beat a little faster.

"You're burning a hole in me!"

She felt it too. Or at least something akin to it. Draco hadn't burned her, but he had come in and plucked a part of her out, taking it with him when he left. She wasn't sure, but it might have been her heart.

Her own fire burned brighter for a moment as she gave in to her frustration. This was his fault. He was jealous beyond belief and more possessive than she thought possible. He had overreacted and not listened to her *either* of the times she tried to talk to him. He was the reason they hadn't soaked in the bath together tonight. Him and his stupid Slytherin arrogance.

She wanted to slap him. She wanted to kiss him. She wanted... him. Despite everything, Hermione wanted him.

She brushed her darkened curls back and tightened the towel around her then looked up and saw him standing there.

Hermione jumped back and slipped on the wet floor. "Oh!" she cried out and her arm waved out, trying to find her balance.

A strong hand grabbed it and he pulled her to him. Hermione latched onto the front of his black shirt, clinging to him so she wouldn't go crashing down. His other arm snaked around her, holding her up and against him.

Hermione looked up hesitantly, eyes wide. He was staring back down at her with those hard grey eyes. Was this real? He hadn't even acknowledged her existence in days and now he was here, and she was in his arms again. Merlin, it felt good. Too good.

His fingers flexed and he gripped her tighter. Hermione was stable now and released his shirt only to spread her fingers across the black fabric of his shirt, remembering the way his chest had felt against her hands, her skin...

He let out a low breath and she smelled the sickly sweetness of whisky on his breath. He was drunk. Of course he was. That's probably why he was here, he'd never be here if he was sober. Would he? Had he missed her too? Goodness, if he had missed her half as much as she had missed him...

"Granger," he breathed out and the smell of whisky mixed with his mint invaded her nostrils and she closed her eyes, breathing it in. Something flared up in her; she could feel it rising from the deep place she had pushed it down into but with him here in front of her, she couldn't stop it.

Then he was kissing her. Hard and deep and rough. Hermione let out a little moan and Malfoy growled deep in his throat, tightening his hold on her. They were stumbling backwards; his hands moving over her, down her back and up into her wet hair, controlling her. Hermione gave in. She wanted this. Wanted him. More than anything.

His mouth moved down her jaw and to her neck, nipping at the skin there. The sensation was overwhelming but she couldn't shut up the little voice in her head that kept screaming *don't let him get away with this!*

Hermione gasped as he latched on to the sensitive spot right below her ear. "Draco, Draco stop."

His lips stopped moving immediately, but they didn't leave her skin. She could feel his body tense on top of hers. He was waiting.

She had half a mind to make him wait as long as he had made her wait, but truth be told she wanted this just as badly as he did. Even if she wants to make him pay first.

She pushed on his shoulders and gradually he pulled back until she was looking up into his eyes, the whites tinged with red and the pupils expanded, almost taking over the smoky grey.

"You said you were done."

"I lied." It came out so easy, like he just told her that the grass was green.

Hermione blinked her eyes wide at him. "You did all that just to, what? Teach me a lesson?"

His expression didn't change. "I meant it," he said tonelessly and Hermione thought she might sink through the floor. 'When I said it. Things changed. My cock never agreed with my mouth anyways.' He smirked and leaned down close to her again, lips hovering above hers. "I can't stay away from you. And you don't want me to, do you, Sweetheart?"

Hermione stopped breathing. How did he always seem to know what she was thinking? *Maybe he feels the same as you.* She frowned in thought. Was this just physical for him right now? And also, did she even care?

"Oh, Granger, if you stick that lip out, it's fair game. And I play dirty." His mouth was back on hers, tongue slipping in and sliding against hers, swirling in her mouth and filling it with the mint and whisky taste of him. He sucked on her bottom lip before grazing it with his teeth, threatening her with the bite she knew would soon come.

She pulled her head to the side. He was drunk. She hated when he drank. It always ended up with them fighting and how could she know this was real if he was inebriated right now?

Would he still want her in the morning? Would she still want him after tonight?

“So you get horny and come and find me,” she snapped. “What if I’m not in the mood?”

Draco gave her a knowing look. “Want me to get you wet?”

“I want you to beg me.” Hermione was shocked by her own words, almost as much as Draco seemed to be, but she didn’t let it show on her face. She held his grey gaze in her rich brown one.

“Beg?” he asked as if he didn’t understand the word. “I think you’ve forgotten how this works.”

Hermione gave him a seemingly innocent smile. Two could play that game. “There must be something you can do to... convince me.”

Lightning struck in his stormy eyes and his lips parted slightly as he sucked in a quick breath. She was proud of herself. It wasn’t often that she rendered him speechless. In fact, Draco always seemed to have a well-timed quip to everything she said. He could go toe to toe with her and hold his own. Time to see if he could hold anything else.

Draco leaned in close to her, running his hands up her arms and pushing them into her. “You’re all I thought about,” he breathed out. ‘Every waking moment— you were there. Here.’ His lips moved over her jaw to her neck to her ear, his breathing hot and heavy in it. “I could beat off, I could drink myself stupid, but I couldn’t get you out. You’re in my blood, Granger.”

She... had not been expecting *that*.

“And I don’t want you out.”

Oh dear Godric... her legs were weak. Actually weak. She felt frozen and alive all at the same time. He could be lying, saying what he needed to for her to sleep with him again, but it didn’t sound like he was lying. And he had mentioned he told the truth when he drank...

“So let me in. Let me in, Granger, let me back in.”

It wasn’t even a choice. He had never left, not really. He had slithered inside and found a place in her, a place no one else had ever reached.

“Yes, Draco, yes,” she gasped out and he picked her up, wrapping her legs around him. Hermione moved her hands up, grabbing the back of his neck and holding herself up on him. She whimpered a moan into his mouth and Draco swallowed it down, probing her for more with his tongue.

He knelt down and laid her back on the cool tile floor, kissing her again, his lips showing no mercy and she asked for none. Her fingers knotted in his hair, pulling it, letting him know how much she wanted this. Needed this. *Loved* this.

Draco sat up, breathing heavily. Hermione looked up at him, a little nervous. He wouldn’t just leave her here again, would he? He had left her gasping in the Library and breathless in the Room of Requirement, she didn’t think she could take it if he left again.

Draco pulled her towel open, flinging it back off her body. His eyes darkened with lust as he gazed down at her. She lay still, waiting for him to make a move. He traced a finger from the dip of her throat down between her breasts to her navel, his eyes following it. Then they cut back up to hers.

“Mine,” he growled.

Hermione nodded. She was. And more than that, she wanted to be.

He was back on her, hands scouring every inch of her. Hermione moaned into his mouth. Yes yes yes. Her body tightened and she felt him pulling at his trousers. His hands grabbed at her breasts, digging in before he pinched her nipples and twisted them a little. He dropped his hands to her thighs, pulling them up around him. Hermione stilled, letting him. Her tender chest was so sensitive as his shirt brushed over it and Draco positioned himself firmly on top of her, pinning her down.

“Please, Malfoy,” she gasped as he grazed his teeth down her neck. “Take me. I’m yours.”

He filled her. She cried out, clasping her hands to him. He didn’t ease into her this time and start slowly to build up, no, this had already been building up and now he was giving it to her. All of it.

She gasped and panted, wincing as he stretched her. Draco grunted with effort, driving himself deeper and deeper. He grabbed her face, turning her head up and making her look at him as he plunged himself inside her.

“You want me?” he panted.

Hermione whimpered and nodded.

“Say it.”

“I want you. Oh God, Draco, I want you.”

He sunk himself in and Hermione’s mouth opened up as she gasped.

“And Weasley?” he growled.

Hermione’s heart skipped a beat. Now? He was asking her this *now*?

She grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him down to her. “Only you.”

Draco growled again and pulled her hand from his soft black shirt, gathering her other hand and pushing them above her head, holding them with one of his large ones like he had their first time.

He groaned loudly and pulled her leg up higher, hooking it in his elbow and thrusting himself back into her. Hermione’s head fell back as her body was alight with the bliss rising in her. Their sounds echoed off of the tiles around them, Hermione’s high pitched gasps and the sound of Draco’s body slapping against hers. She knew she was loud, but didn’t even care. Nothing mattered now except him.

He sucked at her neck viciously. She’d have to cast another glamour charm, but it felt too good to make him stop. Maybe it was wrong, but she liked having his marks on her. She liked that he wanted to give them to her. His grip on her wrists tightened and he pressed them into

the hard tile floor. Hermione gasped and Draco sunk his teeth in, just hard enough to make her clench pleasurably.

It was fast and demanding. The passion was burning, raging, turning into an inferno. One that she would gladly walk through if Draco was on the other side. She had thought it was over, that she'd never have him again, never feel like this again. But Draco was here now, he hadn't been able to walk away either. The emotions in her chest, pumping in her blood, didn't seem foolish now. She could feel the same ones in him; pressing, pounding into her.

She felt him speed up and knew he must be getting close. It had been long enough and they both wanted this desperately. Draco was being rough, taking her, claiming his territory. He turned his urgent lips on hers and he held her face up to his, making her look at him as he thrust himself in her.

"Come, Draco," she moaned. "I missed this so much. *You* so much. Please... I want you to come." His hand tightened around her wrists again and sweet pain shot down her arms, through her body, and between her legs, making her clench hard around him as it exploded there. Hermione let loose a high pitched moan and pressed her hips up into him as he bore down on her.

He made a weak noise as he pushed himself back and she felt him release on her thigh. "Goddamn, Granger, what the fuck..." he said hoarsely and for a moment she thought he was angry until he turned his eyes back up to hers and they were shining like polished silver.

"Did... did you just beg me to come?" he asked, a little slurred, like he wasn't sure this was real.

Hermione bit her lip and nodded, feeling herself blush a little. He still had her hands in his and she squirmed a little on the towel under her, her body still coming down. He was hovering over her, expression changing from dumbfounded to... was he nervous?

Draco's mouth crashed back onto hers and she moaned into it again. His fingers dove into her hair and wrapped around the back of her neck, pulling her up against him, controlling their kiss. She arched her back, pressing her chest against him, loving this feeling she had missed so much.

"Fuck, I love—"

The shock of those words shot through her and she froze, her entire body stiffening and feeling the same stillness she had when she had been petrified. What was he about to say?

Draco's grey eyes went wide and fearful. He was still on top of her, holding her hands above her head, staring down at her like she might attack him.

The floor might have turned upside down or maybe just they had. Had he really been about to say—

"That. I loved that. Shit, I'm wasted." He released her and sat up, still watching her warily, waiting to see her reaction as he rubbed his hand through his pale blond hair and over his face. Returning it to its usual apathetic arrogance.

Hermione slowly wrapped the towel back around her and looked at everything that wasn't him, trying to keep the shock off her face as she processed this. She had no idea what to say

or what to do... Did he mean to or was he just drunk? *Really* drunk. Did she want him to say it? Did she...?

She sat up and pulled her legs up to her chest and Draco sat back on his heels, fixing his trousers back closed. No... he couldn't have meant *that*, could he? Anyways, he had corrected himself. And he *did* let things slip when he drank. But the question now was what had slipped, his tongue or his heart?

"Why... why were you drinking?" she asked. She had to say something. If he left before she did...

He glanced up at her, looking much more sober than he had a moment ago. The shock must have gotten to him too. But he seemed grateful at her slight change of subject.

"Celebrating," he said as he buckled his belt back.

"What were you celebrating?" She chewed on her lip, wrapping her arms around her knees.

Draco studied her for a moment and then leaned in and kissed her, softer this time, but still enveloping. Nothing like the harsh ones he had ambushed her with, but full of the same possessiveness he had taken her with. His hand stayed on the side of her neck and his thumb brushed over her cheek and down her to her throat as he pulled back and smirked at her.

"I've decided to forgive you."

Forgive her? But she didn't do anything wrong! Maybe now was not the time to point that out though. Letting her pride run away with her was what got her in this mess in the first place. But, that didn't mean she had to roll over. She did enough rolling with him.

"I've decided to forgive you too."

Draco cocked a brow up. "Oh?"

She nodded. He grinned. He was in a good mood. Well, who wouldn't be after that?

"Good girl."

"Draco—" Hermione called out as he made to stand up. He glanced back at her. It was risky, but... she had to. "You're not going to go after Ron, are you?"

His face turned cold and emotionless. "You think he should get away with that, huh?" He pretended to adjust his belt again.

Hermione got to her feet, pulling the damp towel around her again. "It won't happen again. I promise. But... he is my friend. You can't hurt him."

He stood up, still looking at the floor. Draco's expressionless features were impossible to read and she waited, hoping, praying, that he would agree.

"What if I do?"

Hermione's heart sank. They were negotiating. She was negotiating Ron's safety. At least they were talking about this. It might not be the healthiest thing to have to discuss, but for the first time they were communicating instead of just reacting.

"That would be a hard line." She wanted to put this in terms he would clearly understand.

"That's not really how that works," Draco smirked, as if he knew something she didn't.

"Well if you cross that line, I won't be able to forgive you."

Draco seemed to consider this, testing it out behind his silver eyes.

"If he touches you again—" he started.

"He won't."

"Well, let's just say McLaggen got off easy."

"You said you didn't do that to him."

"I say a lot of things," he shrugged.

"So it would seem." She hugged her arms around herself.

She felt his grey eyes studying her.

"What's that mean?"

"Nothing."

"You sure about that?" he asked, almost taunting her. Should she mention it? She had a feeling that once he left tonight he wouldn't let her bring it up again.

"No. You've told me you don't mean what you say when you've been drinking."

He leaned close to her, the whisky heavy on his breath. "I mean it when I say you're mine, Granger, and I'm not letting you go."

Fireworks burst in her chest and Draco grinned down at her. She realized that she was beaming broadly up at him. The smell of the whisky that had carried him here tonight filled the space between them and her smile slipped.

"Stop drinking," she snapped. "I mean *that*. If you come near me drunk again, I won't have you." Things had been good, for a while, when he stopped drinking. She wanted that back. Tonight... she wasn't sure what tonight had been other than some sort of reconciliation, but if they were to have any kind of chance of continuing this, he had to stop abusing alcohol.

"Stop kissing other guys."

She glared at him and found the mischievous gleam in his eyes again. Somehow, beyond all reason, Draco was happy. She couldn't say her own spirits hadn't lifted either.

He smirked down at her. "How much of body count do you want me to rack up, Sweetheart?" He kissed the top of her head and let his hands move down her arms. His touch was cool and he rubbed her wrists a little, taking away a bit of the soreness there. He was joking, right? She felt a little uneasy, but it faded, same as the ache in her arms under his powerful but precise affections.

Draco intertwined their fingers together and pushed a few half dried curls back from her face. The creature in her chest purred excitedly. He was holding her hand. *Draco* was holding *her* hand.

“I mean it, Granger.” He placed a soft kiss against her swollen lips and then breathed out, leaning his forehead against hers. “I’ll stop drinking, okay? Will that make you happy?”

Hermione frowned a little, and she wasn’t sure why. Maybe because she had been hoping it would have followed that up with something different. She nodded and Draco released her, placed another soft kiss on her lips and then turned and left her standing there for the second time in one week.

20. twenty

Chapter 20

“Hermione! Hermione, where are you?!” Ron’s voice was faint and the darkness in the black tiled hallway weighed down on her. She heard shuffling behind her and tried to run, but her legs were barely moving under her. “Hermione!”

She opened her mouth to call out to him, but couldn’t make her voice sound. The darkness felt like a living thing, pressing in on her; coiling, tightening. She had almost made it to a door when they started to spin, speeding past her. The air moved around her, uninhibited by the oppressive darkness in it. Finally the doors slowed to a stop and she stared at the one in front of her. Someone was banging on the other side, trying to beat it down.

She stood still, perfectly in place as whoever was on the other side of the door threw their fists into it, thundering blow and blow onto the dark wooden door. Hermione filled her lungs with air. She didn’t know how, but she knew who was on the other side. Maybe she had always known.

The doorknob turned. Creaking slowly it opened and there he was. The Death Eater with the metal mask and silver eyes. She stopped breathing. He placed one big black boot over the threshold, eyes locked onto hers.

The Death Eater held out a black gloved hand. “*You want me?*”

Her arms weren’t working, just hanging limply at her sides. She knew his voice; deep and throaty, *commanding*. Hermione opened her mouth but nothing passed through, not even air. She was trapped. Trapped in his silver eyes glittering in the mask.

“*Say it.*”

She was lost in the moment as time moved past the two of them, steady in a swirling world.

“I want you,” she breathed out in a whisper.

“Hermione!” Ron had burst through a door on the other side of the round chamber. Hermione turned her head and looked at him. “Hermione, hurry he’s—”

“Come with me. Come with me, Granger.” The Death Eater spoke again. Hermione glanced between them for a moment. Ron’s blue eyes were pleading with her, his freckled hand beckoning her back to him. The shining silver eyes flashed dangerously and the Death Eater stuck his hand out a little further, fingers open and waiting for hers.

She looked down at the gloved hand. Her hand hovered over it.

“Yes, Pet,” he spoke gently now, but with an underlying danger.

“Hermione, no!” Ron shouted and she glanced back at him.

The Death Eater growled in frustration and he grabbed her wrist tightly. Hermione gasped in pain. Her toffee colored eyes cut up to his and the mask was gone. It was him. His silver eyes were boring down into hers, his lip curling and pale skin shone in the darkness.

“Draco!”

Hermione awoke with a start, thrashing against the sheets that had tangled around her arms and legs like snakes. She was breathing fast and heavy. It was him. It was Draco. She had always guessed, but seeing his face in place of the mask for the first time... Hermione sat up and pushed her tangled hair out of her face.

Lavender and Parvati were both sitting up in their beds staring at her with wide eyes and open mouths. Oh no...

“Did you just say Draco?” Lavender asked, blue eyes lighting up sickly. “As in *Draco Malfoy*?”

Hermione pushed the sheets back from her and stood up, grabbing her robe. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she muttered, mind still reeling from her dream.

“I heard it too,” Parvati chimed in. “Were you *dreaming* about him?”

Hermione pulled the tie of her robe tight, gasping as it squeezed her waist.

“Do you *like* him?!” Lavender’s voice was full of incredulous triumph, like she couldn’t believe it, but also desperately wanted to.

Hermione threw her a nasty look. “You must have misheard me.”

“Oh no, I’ve heard you call out Ron’s name enough times,” Lavender said nastily and Hermione paused. “I guess you’re done with him now and onto someone new. Just had to ruin my relationship first, right?”

Lavender’s words stung and Hermione glared at her. “I didn’t do anything to your relationship. It fell apart all on it’s own,” she snapped.

Lavender pulled back, hurt by this. Parvati, as always, jumped to her defense. “I’ve seen you staring at him. Malfoy. Or I guess *Draco* to you.”

Hermione had never really gotten along with her dorm mates, but she had never felt so attacked by them either. “Like I said,” she enunciated, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She closed the door sharply behind her then leaned against it, finally allowing herself to catch her breath.

“I swear there is something going on with them.” She could hear Lavender talking through the closed door.

“I know, have you noticed he hasn’t picked on her lately? He always found a way to make fun of her or call her names, but now, nothing.”

“But he’s a Slytherin and a Pureblood, what could he possibly see in Hermione?”

"I don't know," Parvati said thoughtfully. 'She did say she liked Quidditch players that one time,' Hermione rolled her eyes; that had just been to upset Ron. "She went to the Yule Ball with Krum and Slughorn's party with Cormac... Maybe Malfoy is next on her list."

"I can't believe Ron would fall for someone like her. I always thought he kept her around because she did homework for him. Now I wonder what she's *really* doing with all these guys." Hermione's face fell; Lavender's tone was sharp and accusatory.

"Well, if it's Malfoy you *know* what she's doing then."

"I bet Ron won't think she's so great now."

Her heart tightened. Lavender wouldn't... would she? She had told Ron about the night she hadn't come back to the dorms and she blamed Hermione for ending her relationship. Certainly she would have no problem telling Ron what she had said in her sleep.

"Still... Malfoy? Even if she's trying to get with him, I don't think he'd have her. He's as Purist as they come," Parvati commented.

She didn't want to hear any more. Hermione ran her fingers through her hair, trying to brush out the tangles in her curls and headed down to the common room. It was early for a Saturday, but there were a couple of people already down. Rain was pelting against the windows and the wind howled outside. She assumed her fellow students were those awoken by the storm and unable to return to sleep.

Once Ron had woken her from sleep at the Burrow when there was a storm during the middle of the night and they had sat in front of the dying fire and he told her how he could never sleep during a thunderstorm. She had stayed up with him, for hours, until eventually it calmed to a pattering rain and he had drifted off, head falling back on the couch they shared together.

It didn't take long before she spotted his red hair tucked away in the far corner in a large armchair. She padded towards him, wrapping her arms around herself.

"Hi, Ron," she said, sitting down in the chair across from him.

"Hermione," he sounded surprised. "What are you doing up?"

She shook her head a little. "Couldn't sleep."

"Did the storm wake you up too?"

"No, a dream actually."

Ron leaned forward a little, blue eyes bright in the dark room. "The Department of Mysteries again?"

She nodded. "Yeah," she sighed and looked at the paned window and watched a few drops of water stream down.

"Sorry," he muttered.

She looked back at him. At her best friend. He hadn't brought up their almost kiss since she told him to drop it and he had seemed to accept that she didn't feel that way towards him

anymore. And if she could find it in herself to forgive Draco for everything he had done, surely she could forgive Ron. Hermione gave him a small smile.

“It’s fine.”

Draco couldn’t keep the smug look off of his face as he walked down the corridors. He had her back. He had Granger back. She was his and he was never, ever letting her go again. The rain was pouring, pounding against the windows but to him it felt like spring shower, cleansing and calming because he had Granger and she *liked* him.

She wasn’t like Pansy who liked him for the position it brought her or Daphne who liked him for his money. Granger liked *him*. And he liked her. It was... odd, but he enjoyed her quick wit and little jokes. He liked her shy smile and bright eyes. He liked... Granger. Draco Malfoy liked Hermione Granger.

But he liked fucking her even better. Or at least, that’s what he kept telling himself. He had spent the better part of the previous week in a drunken stupor, only sobering up enough to work on the Cabinet and then drowning his sorrows again while he tried to convince himself that his hand was a suitable replacement for her. That’s where all those other, messy feelings were coming from. The alcohol and the lack of control it brought him. It must be.

Because when he was in control of himself, he could take all those confusing feelings about the Gryffindor Princess and lock them away inside a chest inside a room inside a heavily walled part of his mind and leave them there. Where they belonged. Well, they didn’t belong in him at all; he was Draco Malfoy for Salazar’s sake, but he would figure that out later. Right after he figured out how to get Granger to leave with him when he was finished here. Because he wasn’t finished with her. Not even close. He was just getting started.

He sauntered into Charms with Theo and Crabbe right behind him. Goyle had decided to sleep in because Draco had kept him waiting in the hall outside the Room of Requirement until almost four in the morning. Pussy.

He slouched gracefully in his seat, twirling his wand between his fingers when Potter, Weasley, and Granger walked in, heads bent together and talking quietly amongst themselves.

He immediately leaned forward, brows resting heavily over his grey eyes. Granger was chastising Potter about something. Good.

Well, maybe not. He’d prefer if she stopped hanging out with those two altogether. They were sure to be an issue in the future and Granger was strangely attached to them. When he took her, no, not ‘took’, more like... well yeah, *took*. When he took her with him he knew giving them up would be her biggest hurdle and honestly, they very well could come looking for her.

Let them. Draco sneered as he leaned back and Granger took her seat, dropping her overfilled bag with a large thud. After Dumbledore, Potter and Weasley would be a breeze. And he wouldn’t be on his own then.

The sudden image of Potter lying still at his feet with wide staring eyes flashed in his mind and he was surprised by the uncomfortable churning inside of him. He saw that Muggle’s pale

face as he stared unseeingly at the ceiling. He'd been alive when Draco left him on Christmas... right?

Left just enough of him so he could burn alive. Draco blanched. He hadn't looked back. Maybe they got out, maybe... But he had felt the heat on his back. *No screams. There hadn't been any screams.* He tried to reason it out; he didn't have a choice though, Bellatrix had made him... no. That wasn't entirely right either. He didn't *have* to go with them that night and after the first couple *crucio* curses Rodolphus hadn't even barked, "Again!"

Theo elbowed him in the side, nodding his head to the front of the class where Professor Flitwick was clearing his throat with a high little cough. Draco quickly gathered himself and pulled out his book, glancing at Theo's to see what page they were supposed to be reading.

He stared down at the page, not even bothering to move his eyes as he felt the deep ache of the mark under his robes. Granger could never know. She could never find out what he'd done. She wouldn't understand.

She wasn't from his world. She didn't know the way he was raised, the pressure he'd been under his whole life. The threat of failure that his Dark Lord had promised him with. His father had failed and was now dying in a prison cell and was only granted that long of a reprieve because the Ministry had gotten to him first.

He watched as his mother fell to her knees in front of the Dark Lord, begging for her husband's life. Tears streaming down her thin face as she clawed at his robes. Draco had stood silently a few feet back, frozen in place, watching the Dark Lord smirk down at Narcissa Malfoy, star of Pureblood society, begging at his feet while he sat in his father's chair.

"There is one thing," Bellatrix had chimed in sweetly. "One thing you could offer to replace Lucius' failure to retrieve the Prophecy."

The Dark Lord's red slit eyes had slid over to her. "Yes?"

Bellatrix took a tentative step forward, so unlike her normal boisterous self and dipped her head. "Draco," she said his name softly and his head cut towards her. "Draco could take the mark, take his place."

His fate had been sealed with those words. His mother hadn't dared protest once the Dark Lord took a liking to the idea, but her deep blue eyes told him everything he needed to know as they welled up with tears again and she looked at him, pleading, but for what, he hadn't been sure.

It had never been a choice, not really. Even if his aunt hadn't suggested it then, even if his father had retrieved the Prophecy, it would have ended with the black brand on his arm. One day or another. Ever since the Dark Lord returned at the end of his fourth year he had known — he would serve as a Death Eater.

It was in his blood. But now so was she.

His scalp prickled a little and he glanced up to see Granger's chocolate eyes on him. She had the smallest little smile on her lips and she crossed her ankles, shifting a little in her seat. As always, she was able to bring him out of his dark cloud of thoughts with the sunshine of her smile.

His eyes tightened mischievously and she glanced down at her open book just to look back up at him through her dark lashes. She really was a beauty. Simple, not like the girls who layered on makeup around their eyes and lips, Granger looked... pure.

Damn, he could fuck the shit out of her right now. She was glancing up at him, biting her goddamn lip and reminding him of the strange little looks they used to share before. He'd be lying if he said she hadn't intrigued him for quite a while now. He fantasized about lots of girls, but never as much as he had Granger.

At first he had chalked it up to being horny all the time. He was a teenage boy after all, but the fact that she was something he shouldn't want kept her locked in his head time after time. It was one thing to think about her when he was beating off, it was another when he started to imagine she was the one face down on his bed when he was balls deep in Pansy. That's when he knew it wasn't just hormones. It was *her*.

And now? Now he couldn't *stop* thinking about her. He had stopped looking at other girls, stopped flirting with them. It was all about Granger. His girl. His... were they something now? No... well...

Draco looked down at his open book in thought. He had only ever dated Pansy for a bit back in fourth year and that had mostly been because she wanted a boyfriend and he wanted regular access to her snatch. What did a boyfriend do exactly?

He wasn't fucking anyone else. He had planned out their flying excursion and the night in the Room of Requirement. He didn't do things that he knew she didn't like such as calling her Mudblood and getting pissed. And she was his. Sweet Salazar... *were* they dating?

No. Nope. No.

Fuck no.

He didn't do girlfriends.

He was just doing... her.

Draco smirked. He looked up to catch Granger staring at him again. She blushed a little and he threw her a wink. Her cheeks darkened to that beautiful shade of Gryffindor red that he loved.

Mmm, the same shade they had been when he had gotten done with her in the bathroom the other night. The memory of her mewling under him as he took her back made his trousers feel a couple sizes too small in the front and he cast his eyes back down. The last thing he needed was to get a hard on in the middle of class when Granger was looking at him with her big doe eyes.

They hadn't exactly talked since then, but they had shared little looks like this over the past couple of days. It was fun and playful. They were back at it, just like before. Except... it wasn't. It was even better. Because now he knew she liked him. Only him. Fuck, it made him feel like the sun was shining through every one of his veins. No, not the sun— *her*. She was inside him now and he didn't ever want her to leave.

Lightning struck close outside one of the windows and a few students jumped, one Hufflepuff girl screamed and covered her mouth. Flitwick climbed back on his stack of books

and tried to quiet and settle the class. Draco looked over at the window, dark and grey despite it only being midmorning.

With the rest of the class distracted, Draco took a chance and looked up at Granger again. His smugness faded as he saw her with her head bent down low close to Potter's, whispering something in his ear with a concerned look on her face. Were they planning something? Potter always did seem to find his way into trouble and most of the time he dragged Granger along with him.

Not this time though. No one was taking her away from him now. If anyone was going to be dragging her off somewhere it was going to be him.

"Hermione!" Ginny pulled at Hermione's hand. "It stopped raining! Let's go outside!"

Hermione looked up from her book and into the excited faces of Ginny Weasley and Luna Lovegood. Ginny's light brown eyes were shining and Luna's pale blue ones were larger than they normally were. She glanced over at the window and it indeed had stopped raining. In fact, the sun was out.

It had been almost a week of nothing but grey rain, whipping winds, and stormy skies. She had been avoiding her dorm as much as possible and had spent several late nights and/or early mornings sitting in the common room with Ron. She had sat by the window with him and watched the storm outside, thinking about Draco. She had silently climbed into bed after the baths and although her body was sore, her heart wasn't. He had been rough, maybe the roughest he had ever been with her, but it had been different from the other times. He wasn't rough because he wanted to hurt her, he was rough because he was... she didn't really know what to call it, other than

She hadn't minded being kept in the castle too much really. Hermione already spent most of her time indoors and it also meant that she had gotten to catch Draco's eye multiple times a day. They hadn't had a chance to be together since the night in the baths, but there had been a shift between them. They had acknowledged their feelings, they had tried to go without, and they had both come back.

But it was nice to see the sun again. Hermione grinned up at them and stood up, setting her book down on the table. "Ron, can you take that back upstairs for me?"

Ron looked slightly disappointed then muttered, "Yeah, sure."

Hermione felt herself smiling wider as she followed Ginny and Luna from the Great Hall and outside the castle. The grounds were still soggy, but for the first time in days the sun was peeking out from behind the grey storm clouds and Hermione pulled off her sweater, wanting to feel more of its warming rays on her skin.

Luna laughed dreamily as Ginny spun around in front of them, doing a sort of dance with her long red hair flying out around her. Hermione couldn't help but join in. Her good mood had persisted despite the rain, but now was rising into giddiness with the small glimpses of blue sky in between the cloud-streaked sky.

They wandered around outside for a little bit, making their way down to the Lakeshore. Ginny and Luna were talking about some of the people in their year and Hermione let her mind drift, gazing out over the still surface of the Lake, sparkling every now and then as the cloud cover shifted and the sun hit it just right.

Draco had been flirty recently and it was making the bubbles inside of her fill almost to the bursting point. It felt different now. It wasn't just random hook ups in an empty classroom anymore. The way Draco had acted that night coupled with the fact that he actually said that he liked her... it had changed things for Hermione. Since he wasn't ignoring her or pretending she didn't exist let her know it changed things for him too.

They weren't in a relationship, she knew that much, but they were something now. She didn't really know what it was, but she liked it. What she didn't like was that it had been quite some time since they had been able to be alone together. She had wandered up to the seventh floor landing on a few of her patrols and even took a detour into the Restricted Section, but Draco hadn't been around.

She was a little disappointed, but she knew that eventually he would slide out in front of her behind a corner or something with that devilish smirk on his face and she would *melt*. Without Draco's attention, her mind had been working overtime again, especially about Harry and what he had learned in his lessons with Dumbledore. She felt like there was something he was leaving out and she was worried about what he might be holding back and trying to deal with on his own. She still remembered the outbursts of angry shouting that had been so common last year.

The more she thought about it, the more dire everything seemed to be. So why was she sitting here thinking about Draco Malfoy of all people and bouncing her knee because she was so excited to see him again? Because she liked him. She *really* liked him. She might even — no. She... didn't. Couldn't. *Wouldn't*.

If she let her feelings for him progress *there* then it could be a distraction when the war came. She had to remember that he was the son of Lucius Malfoy, who was, up until last summer, one of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's greatest Death Eaters.

And he hates you.

Hermione's smile faltered and fell. She had thought this through time and time again. Draco might hate Muggleborns, but she didn't think he hated *her*. Not really. At least not anymore. He had said that he liked her and sometimes they way his silver eyes shone when he looked at her... that wasn't hate. That was... something else.

He hated what she was, but he didn't hate her. It was all very confusing and anyone else she would make them sit down and have a straight, open and honest conversation with her about this, but Draco... no. Hermione raised her chin up. No, she should talk to him about this. She had a right to know how he felt about their... situation. She had a right to know if this was going to go somewhere.

Her breath caught in her throat and she blinked her eyes a few times as she realized that she *did* want this to go somewhere. She wasn't sure what or where, but... she wanted whatever this was to continue and she wanted Draco. Not just a hidden tryst in a closet, but she wanted— him.

Oh dear. That was disconcerting.

Hermione glanced over at Ginny and Luna who were talking about Divination. Luna had seemed to understand her feelings when she had spoken to her, but that was weeks ago. Ginny on the other hand might very well never speak to her again if she found out. And a sneering voice warned her that he could leave just as quickly again if she did something else he didn't like and then where would she be?

She glanced down at her feet. She couldn't lose her friends. Not Ginny, not Ron, and not Harry. She loved them and Draco... she wasn't sure what she felt for him.

"Luna, did Hermione ever tell you about when she stormed out and dropped Divination?" Ginny said with a wide smile.

Luna's eyes enlarged. "Oh, no! I've never heard that story."

Hermione turned to join their conversation when thunder rolled in the sky above them. All three girls looked up to see dark storm clouds moving fast over the tops of the towering trees in the Forbidden Forest. Hermione's loose curls were blown back off her shoulders by a cold wind.

"Oh balls," Ginny muttered and held her hand palm up for a fat drop of rain to fall directly onto it with a small splash.

Hermione only had time to blink her eyes once before the heavens opened up and the downpour began.

"Luna! Come on!" Ginny had already jumped up and was trying to pull her Ravenclaw friend to her feet as Luna turned her luminescent eyes up at the falling rain, vaguely smiling.

Hermione followed suit, gathering her feet under her and looking up at the long distance between them and the castle.

"We'll have to run!" Ginny shouted as the heavy rain began to fill the warm air around them with noise.

Hermione nodded and followed after Ginny who was hauling Luna by her hand.

By the time they reached the large doors to the Entrance Hall Hermione was soaked through, not a inch of her dry. Her curls long and dark, were dripping water onto the stone floor. Not to mention her clothes that were sticking to every inch of her.

"Bit chilly now," Luna commented in her dreamy voice, lazily rubbing her hands over her arms.

Ginny was swearing enough that Hermione had to remind her that they were back inside now and to lower her voice. Luna stuck a bit of her long blonde hair into her mouth as sucked the rainwater from it. This made Ginny's scowl turn into a bright smile as she laughed and even Hermione forgot about her waterlogged shoes for a moment.

"Here, I know a charm," she offered and pulled out her wand and pointed it at Ginny who held out her arms. Hermione was and made sure to focus carefully so as to not make the air too hot while she dried Ginny's clothes. Sometimes magic had a way of backfiring.

“Luna?” she offered, but Luna merely shook her head, sucking on another long piece of hair and waved goodbye before wandering in the direction of the stairwell that led up to Ravenclaw Tower.

“Here, let me do you,” Ginny said, running her fingers through her hair and tossing it to make it fall how she liked.

Hermione would have preferred to cast her own charm, but Ginny looked excited to try it so Hermione gave her the incantation and lifted her arms to let her practice.

Ginny’s light brown eyes narrowed in concentration as she moved her wand over Hermione. The air was hot almost to the point of being uncomfortable, but Luna had been right when she said it was chilly. The rain had sapped most of Hermione’s warmth and the air not only helped dry her clothes, but also returned some of the feeling back to her fingers and toes.

“Almost done,” Ginny muttered. Hermione felt dry enough and actually, it was starting to get uncomfortable under the direct blast of hot air. She sucked in a breath and felt her shirt contract as her chest expanded.

Looking down, Hermione’s mouth opened in surprise.

“Done.” Ginny grinned at her.

“Ginny!” Hermione admonished. “You shrunk my uniform!” Her shirt was pulled tightly across her chest and sucked in at the waist before it tucked into her skirt that... Oh good Godric, her skirt! Never in her life had she ever worn anything that short! The hem hugged her thighs above her knees and she quickly tried to pull it down only to make her shirt pop out from the top and expose her stomach.

“Ginny!” She struggled a little as Ginny smiled proudly.

“Honestly, Hermione, it’s closer to your real size than the clothes you normally wear.”

Hermione glared at her and managed to get her shirt tucked back in. There was nothing to be done about the skirt though, not if she didn’t want to walk around with her midriff showing.

Hermione tossed her hair over her shoulder. “Let’s just get back before anyone sees me.”

The Great Hall had mostly cleared out after dinner, save a few students still hanging around. Blaise was looking down at the chess board, concentrating hard at the small pieces. One of the knight’s mounts reared and stamped his hooves against the marble plaque under him. According to his *friend* there was less temptation for Draco to drink if they weren’t holed up in the common room so Blaise had hauled his chess set up here for the evening.

Blaise pinched his lips and slid his queen a few spaces up, effectively stopping Draco’s rook in its path. He had placed it there to draw the queen out, knowing that he would end up losing his own piece in the process. Call it a casualty of war. It was only a rook, after all.

Draco stared down at the pieces on the board, playing out their potential movements in his mind's eye. Chess was a welcome distraction from the problems he was currently facing. He had tried a less direct approach to killing Dumbledore, trying to send him the necklace and the poisoned mead, but the more and more he plotted, it seemed he'd have to do the dirty work himself and turn his wand on the old Headmaster. He had been mysteriously absent from dinner again and Draco was silently thankful for that. He hated being in the same room with the man now, even if the room was the Great Hall.

Every way he looked at it, he was going to be blocked or risk his own king in a daring attempt to take Blaise's and Draco was not one for needless risk. Every move he made was calculated, plotted, and planned. *Like Granger*. Draco stopped his lips from turning up. No, he shouldn't be happy about being like her. He was *nothing* like her. She was a Mudblood and he was...

Draco shoved a pawn forward carelessly. He was falling for her. Fuck. How long had that been happening? He cringed as Blaise swept his pawn from the board mercilessly.

"I think you're getting worse," Blaise commented drolly.

Draco looked up from the chessboard between them. "I've got a lot on my mind."

"I've noticed," Blaise mumbled.

"What was that?" Draco raised his brows a little and Blaise cut his obsidian eyes to meet Draco's granite ones. "What exactly *have* you noticed, Blaise?"

His fellow Slytherin regarded him carefully before answering. "Nothing too interesting."

"Damn right you haven't," Draco grumbled and pushed his Bishop across the board, seeking revenge for his lost pawn. Blaise quieted as he studied the new placements and Draco took this time to study him.

Blaise was clever; he had picked up everything Draco had accidentally let slip about Granger so far. His latest binges though... there were a few nights he didn't remember too well and Blaise had been watching him more carefully than ever. Had he said something he didn't mean to?

Blaise took out his Bishop with a cheerful smile and sat back. Draco turned his eyes back down to the board and felt Blaise's dark gaze on him.

"I've noticed something about you," Draco casually commented, making note of the knight Blaise was encircling his king with. 'You and that Ravenclaw with the red hair?' Blaise flashed him a cheeky grin and Draco returned it. "Seal the deal yet?"

"Not entirely," his dark eyes glittered. "But she'd been very.... Amenable."

They shared a laugh together. Blaise was one of the few people he could stand to be around anymore. Crabbe and Goyle just complained and Theo was getting to the point where Draco wanted to use him as a tester for the Cabinet and if he got stuck or splinched... *good*.

He and Blaise talked about girls a little more. He had stopped checking out other girls, but Blaise had not and was giving him a run down of each of the houses.

"You know Astoria, Daphne's little sister? She's starting to turn some heads."

Draco shrugged. Daphne had been a boring fuck. He liked girls who obeyed and let him take charge, but there was a difference between that and girls who laid there like a limp fish. Submission was an art. And Granger was a goddamn masterpiece.

Draco was losing his focus on the pieces and gripped his queen with two fingers to enter her into the fray when he stopped, pulled back, and slid his king one space to the right.

He looked up to find Blaise staring at him intently. Draco sat back and cleared his head, putting up a few mental wards to keep his thoughts from distracting him again and Blaise began to smirk before continuing. "Now that Weasley girl? Talk about a great ass."

Draco rolled his eyes and caught movement out of the corner of them. Theo was whispering something to Crabbe and Goyle. They each nodded and then headed out as Theo walked proudly in, dark blue eyes glinting in Draco and Blaise's direction.

Draco turned back to Blaise. "Yeah?" he said, in an effort to continue their conversation and exclude Theo from it as he flopped down at the table with them.

"You're telling me you never noticed? Check it out at their next match. Gryffindor is playing Ravenclaw soon. That uniform," Blaise let out a low breath. "Does wonders for her."

Draco laughed a little as Blaise's dark eyes glittered and trailed his fingers along the black edge of the board.

"Who are we talking about?" Theo asked as he picked at the shards of one of Draco's ruined pieces.

"The Weasley girl, you know, in Gryffindor?" Blaise said, glancing over to Draco again.

"Oh yes," Theo's face lit up. 'Bet she's a tiger in the sack.' He laughed loudly. "Probably have to use a whip. What do you think Draco, isn't that your area of expertise?"

Draco's mouth twitched up. "Something like that," he murmured and made his move.

Blaise's attention was drawn back to the few pieces still remaining and his face pulled tight in thought. Theo shoved his shoulder into Draco's playfully. "Thanks for that, by the way. Pansy's a right doll." He boasted a cold smile.

Draco knew what he was trying to do. He had marked his own territory enough times that he recognized when someone was doing it to him. Theo wanted to make it clear that he was the only one fucking Pansy now, a fact that Draco did not try to amend.

"Glad you're enjoying her. I sure did." Well, just because he wasn't fucking her anymore didn't mean that he was going to let Theo have all the fun.

Theo scowled a little. "This is boring. Let's go back down and actually do something *fun*."

Blaise's expression darkened. "Chess is fun."

"Chess sucks. Draco, back me up here."

If he was honest, he would much rather be down there in the dungeons with a bottle in his hand, laughing about some dumb joke Theo made. He'd also like Granger to be sitting on his lap, maybe playing with his hair a little. He rolled his eyes to discard the vision of her biting her lip and looking up at him with her please-fuck-me eyes.

He shrugged and stared down at the board. There was no way he was going to win this one. “Fuck it, let’s go back.”

Theo grinned and jumped up.

“We haven’t finished,” Blaise said, frowning in disappointment.

Draco pushed himself up. “You win. Congratulations,” he said sarcastically. He was going to lose anyways, why drag it out?

Blaise sneered at him and waved his wand, collecting the pieces as the board snapped shut around them.

They made their way out of the Great Hall and were halfway through the Entrance Hall when he heard her voice.

“Speaking of Gryffindors,” Theo nudged Draco’s arm and turned the conversation back, “that Mudblood up there—” he shook his head appreciatively and Draco’s eyes locked onto Granger’s form. “She might be a know-it-all, but I bet I could teach her a thing or two.” Theo stuck his tongue through his teeth and grinned.

Blaise gently turned his head towards Theo, but his probing eyes stayed on Draco.

Draco had turned as still as a statue. His blood was the only thing that moved in his body. Granger was across the Hall from him and Sweet Salazar, what was she *wearing*?

“Bet that tongue is strong from all the blabbing she—”

Draco launched himself at Theo, pushing him up against the wall between two statues of armor. He hadn’t even realized he had done it until he saw the shock in Theo’s dark blue eyes turn to fury as he struggled against him. Draco pressed his marked arm into Theo’s throat and chest. He could feel the ache burn stronger as it pressed into his adversary. Theo pushed back, but Draco held him firmly in place.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?!” Theo snarled and struggled against him. Draco only let him far enough so that he could shove him back against the wall again. Hard.

“Draco, what the hell?” Blaise said seriously. Draco vaguely wondered if Granger had noticed them yet.

He leaned his face in close to Theo’s. “You want to fuck that Mudblood?” Draco asked between heavy breaths. His stomach curled strangely as he said that word. Hearing Theo talk about Granger like that had made his blood turn to poison in his veins. He had never felt like this about a girl before and certainly never felt this way about someone he shouldn’t feel anything but animosity for. “You disgusting piece of shit.”

“Get your fucking hands off me!” Theo pushed back against Draco again and this time Draco let him up. It was foolish to react that way, but he had done it instinctively. Picturing Theo kneeling behind Granger, grabbing her hips and pulling her back into him had black spots dancing in his vision. He didn’t like thinking about other guys using Granger like he did. No, shit; he wasn’t using her. Not anymore. What did that mean then?

“Don’t tell me you’d turn Blood Traitor for pussy,” Draco summoned up all the venom he had, spitting the words he wanted to say to himself out at Theo instead.

“Fuck you!” Theo spat and straightened his shirt, brushing it off as he glared back at Draco. He might throw a barb at him every now and then, but he knew better than to take a swing at the Slytherin Prince. Instead he just glared, the hatred clear in his dark blue eyes.

“We should leave,” Blaise warned, ever the voice of reason. Draco looked around; there were no teachers present, but... yeah. Granger had seen. Something strange burned deep within him and he dropped his eyes from her shocked face. They rested a second longer on her legs. Seriously, since when did she wear something like that?! The burn inside him changed, turning from sick coolness to a pleasant warmth.

“Cunt is cunt. And that Mudblood—” Theo raised his brown brows up his forehead. He was breathing heavily, mouth open and tongue playing at the edge of it. Draco could practically feel Granger’s gaze on them. Theo hadn’t tried at all to lower his voice so she wouldn’t hear as Draco had; there was no way she could ignore them now. “Is *prime pussy*.”

Oh hell.

Draco threw his fist into Theo’s face and he fell to the ground in a heap.

“Fuck, Draco! What did you do?!” Blaise shouted, hurrying to crouch at Theo’s side.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

It was bad enough Granger had to see him lose his temper and now she had seen him knock someone out. *Fuck*.

What was she even doing down here? And what the hell was she doing wearing *that*?! He glanced back over at her and saw she had covered her mouth with her hand and her chocolate eyes were wide. The Weaslette was standing next to her watching Draco warily. He saw her pull on Granger’s arm, but she remained unmoved.

Draco shook his hand a little. Merlin, Theo had a thick skull. He should have had Crabbe do that for him. But... maybe not. Theo had been talking to them about something. Him, maybe? And what he was doing in the Room of Requirement? Theo had grown curious as to where he was spending his evenings recently. Shit.

Granger was still standing there in her little fucking skirt and shirt that showed exactly how he knew she felt underneath her normally frumpy clothes. The Weasley girl had started up the stairs and was calling her name.

“Hermione, let’s go!”

Fuck off, she knows what she wants. Who she wants.

Draco stalked towards her and Granger just stared at him blankly as if she couldn’t believe what she had just seen. He kept the scowl on his face, which wasn’t hard once he remembered that she was gallivanting around the castle looking hot as *shit* and he only saw because he had stumbled upon her.

Draco stopped at her shoulder and glared down at her, but couldn’t help his heart from racing in his chest. “What the fuck are you doing?” he growled in a low voice. “Pull your fucking skirt down before you flash the whole school. You keep that shit for me, understand?”

Granger's pretty pink lips were barely open and his hands twitched at his sides, wanting to grab her and crash his lips onto hers. He took a deep breath and smelled the cinnamon vanilla of her. He didn't like to be disobeyed. When training his hounds he only selected the most loyal of the pups to turn into his hunting pack. That's why he never lost a quarry on his hunts. He had told her to stop kissing other guys, was this her idea of payback?

His eyes darted down to the strained buttons on her shirt and he could see the outline of her bra through her shirt and— oh shit. Her nipples were hard. Lust replaced the anger in his blood.

Draco winced as his dick responded by deciding now was the perfect time to get a boner. He clenched his jaw and Granger must have mistaken it for anger because she mumbled, "Draco, I-I didn't—"

But she stopped short as her own eyes flickered down to where Draco was trying to push his hard on to the side before anyone else noticed. Deep red flushed in her cheeks and she looked back up at him. He could hear Theo moaning as Blaise hauled him to his feet. Goddamn it, if they weren't in the middle of the Entrance Hall with people around them he would push that skirt up the few inches it covered and sink himself into her. All they'd done is flirt the past few days and he had enough pent up frustration to go at her all night.

For a moment he thought she was going to glare and snap at him, but Granger just looked up at him innocently and blinked her doe eyes. *Oh fuck me, kitten.*

"Walk away from me or I'm going to fuck you right here," Draco warned in a whisper and he watched her pupils grow with arousal. She glanced behind her at the Weasley girl who was already halfway up the stairs before taking a step back towards them herself.

Then she turned back towards him and surprised him with a cheeky grin. *Oh shit, please go.* He knew she had to be wet from the hungry look on her face and that skirt was so damn short. Draco groaned internally as his cock throbbed. Oh if she wanted payback she could have it. Fuck, she could have everything.

Granger bit her lip and tucked a wild curl behind her ear. She was so fucking adorable and so adorably fuckable.

Granger batted her long lashes at him once and his heart skipped a beat in his chest. "Yes sir."

The rain did not stop and contained everyone to the castle for the next few days as it raged outside. Outdoor classes were either canceled or held in the Great Hall and a few of the unused classrooms on the lower floors with the exception of Herbology in which students had to dart from the school, over the muddied grounds, and down to the greenhouses.

Everyone was starting to go a little stir crazy whereas Draco had bypassed crazy and gone straight to outright *insanity*.

Because it just didn't make sense. Why, when he had fucked so many other girls and had no issues, no *feelings*, that screwing *her* would lead to the fire in his chest that he could not

put out no matter what he did or how hard he tried; she just kept burning and taking over, and burning, and scorching, and burning, and Sweet Salazar he loved it.

Shit.

He had watched her in Transfiguration the other day, her caramel and coffee curls loose and wild around her head, falling over her shoulders as she leaned down, nose almost to her parchment and glancing up quickly as McGonagall sped through her lecture. Granger hadn't missed a beat.

If she wasn't a Mudblood, she would be destined for great things. Clever, driven, and determined— Granger should have a bright future ahead of her, instead her best bet was to follow him through the Vanishing Cabinet and agree to... what? Even if he could convince the Dark Lord to let him keep her, she'd be his slave in name. She'd belong to him, like an object. How would she react to that?

Badly. She'd react very badly to that fact. But what else was he supposed to do? Leave her behind to be rounded up with the rest of the Muggleborns and... Oh wow. He had never called them Muggleborns before. They had always been Mudbloods. But... she wasn't. She was something else. Something more.

She was his. She had taken him back and she was his again. No, she had never stopped being his, not really. He had seen how solemn and silent she had been the few days that they hadn't been together. And how many times had she tried to walk away from him always to turn and come back? Yes, she'd react badly, but she cared about him. She could... forgive him.

She'd done it before, she could do it again, right?

It might take time, but at least they *have* time if she came with him. They'd have all the time in the world because he wasn't letting her get away from him again. Even if he had to *drag* her through the Cabinet, he wasn't leaving Granger behind. Not this time.

"Blaise?" Draco asked and Blaise looked up from his book. He chose his words carefully. Blaise already knew too much, knew he had a girl on the side and one that he had been drunkenly bragging about, but there was no one else he could talk to about this. Ghostie was good for some things, but not this. "Do you ever wonder where Mudbloods come from?"

Blaise's eyes darkened and he slipped a piece of parchment into the pages before gently closing his book. "Where they come from?"

"You know," Draco went on. "How they got their magic. Why Muggles suddenly have a child with abilities."

Blaise's face was like a mask, but Draco could see the thoughts swimming in his deep eyes. Finally he took a breath and answered. "My family is a bit different than yours. My father, before he died, told me a bit about our heritage. We're Pure, but it's different where he's from."

"Where's that?" Draco asked. In all the years he had known Blaise, he'd never really spoken much about his deceased father.

“Italy. Bloodlines are regarded a bit differently there. Similar, but... they care more about being able to trace it back as far as they can instead of how Pure it is. Large families, lots of heirs, things like that.”

Draco leaned forward, interested in this new information. He had never really considered how Purity might be measured in other countries or regions of the world or if it even mattered in those places. For him, it had always been a given.

“Growing up here, I got used to the British idea of Purity, through blood and all that. But it’s not like that everywhere. Other places... mix more.” He was choosing his words carefully too.

For a second, Draco wanted to tell him he didn’t care what he said as long as he shared with him this information. There might have been a time that Draco threatened Blaise for entertaining over ideas of Purity, but not anymore. Now he *wanted* to know, but it was hard to get Blaise to open up. It was vague and it didn’t make much sense so far. Blaise was holding out on him.

“So since bloodlines are more interested in continuing instead of being Pure, they... incorporate who they need to in order to survive,” Blaise went on, setting his book down on the table next to his chair. Draco was listening intently; he had never heard anything like this before from his own father. He had always said Mudbloods were abominations and freaks of nature. Mistakes which needed correcting.

“Which means some wizards marry Muggles and do not produce magical children at all. Those children often take non-magical spouses and live in the mundane world. Eventually,” Blaise dropped his eyes to the rich carpet under their feet. “Someone in one of those families is born with magic.”

Holy shit. That’s how it happened. At some point, one of Granger’s ancestors had magic. Maybe they hid it from their spouse or maybe they were a squib or... something, but it had lain dormant in their blood until... her. She was special.

“So what you’re saying is that you think Purebloods like us,” Draco said, not fully accepting or understanding, but more so testing, “share some sort of magical bloodline with Muggleborns at some point.”

Blaise looked confused for a moment, but it quickly went away. Shit. He’d called them Muggleborns again.

“That’s what my father believed.”

Draco sat back and drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair, considering this. There were bastards of the Pureblood families out there. The Lestranges were almost infamous for it and after seeing his uncle Rabastan out in the field, he could understand why.

Many Pureblooded men took mistresses of lesser blood status and many of those unions resulted in illegitimate children. The Malfoys though, were proudly bastard free. He didn’t know if his father had ever taken anyone else and didn’t like the idea of him not being faithful to his mother. He liked the idea of having a half sibling even less, but thankfully that was something he had never had to worry about.

But one day he would be expected to marry a suitable Pureblood woman to carry on the Malfoy name and bloodline. Producing an heir was required of him. Even if he took Granger he'd never... Shit, he was getting way too far ahead of himself. Thinking about marriage and heirs and how she would fit into it. Still, his wife would be for continuing the Malfoy line and Granger would be just for him.

Like she would ever agree to that. Draco frowned darkly.

"Yes sir."

Maybe...? Maybe if she cared about him enough, he could convince her? *She's smarter than you.* But love made people do stupid things. He was living proof of that.

Wait. Love? No.

Shit.

"Why are you asking me this?"

Draco was pulled out of his thoughts and looked back up into the inquisitive eyes of Blaise across from him.

He leaned back into the chair. "If we know where they come from, it will be easier to stop it at the source."

There. That ought to throw him off the scent.

Blaise's face fell. "You're a cold bastard." He stood up. "They're children. Babies."

Draco shrugged, feeling anything but indifference, but he couldn't let it show. "They're a problem."

His throat tightened uncomfortably as Blaise shook his head and looked at him in revulsion before descending down the stairs to their dormitory.

Draco rubbed his hand over his face. Better Blaise think him a cold bastard than know the truth. The truth that he wasn't sure what he thought of Mudbloods and Muggleborns anymore. All he knew was what he thought about one of them and that thought was a very dark and dangerous one for him to have. But he wasn't letting it go either.

Hermione was taking refuge in the Library. After a long and exhausting day of talking with Harry and Ron about everything he had found out about... Lord Voldemort's formative years she wanted nothing more than to lose herself in a good book.

She was working on using his name like Harry did. His courage and bravery had always inspired her and it was time that she stepped from behind her fear and called him by his rightful name. But after reading about all the terrible things he had done when he was in power the first time, she still felt the shake of nerves when she said it.

She browsed the stacks, looking for something interesting to take her mind off of the serious conversation that still weighed heavily on her. She *should* pick something out that she could use for research. Maybe a book on dueling spells or something on healing potions...

She stopped outside the metal gate of the Restricted Section. So much had changed for her in those dark aisles. It was the first place that Draco had approached her and the place where she had lost her virginity. Hermione pulled out her wand, tapped the lock, and whispered the password. The metal gate swung open with a creak.

The air was cooler in this part of the Library and the blue candles began to float in front of her, lighting her path. She wasn't sure where she was headed, but at least it was quiet back here. Students rarely came back here and when they didn't stay long. She had gotten used to the pale blue lights and the musty smell of old books that hung in the air though. In fact, it was almost comforting in a way now.

She stopped in front of a large shelf with a faded red leather book. The gold writing on it was almost nonexistent, but she was just able to make it out as a blue flame candle drifted over her, "*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*".

Hermione pulled it down off the shelf and blew off a layer of dust from the top of it. She had heard of this book before and although she had never been that interested in the lineage of Pureblood families, she was now intrigued as to what it might hold about the Gaunts.

Sitting down and crossing her legs, Hermione cracked it open and began to read.

She had finished the chapter on the Gaunts and saw the name Greengrass on the next page in fine Edwardian script. One of the Slytherin girls in her year was a Greengrass... Diana, maybe? Draco would know.

Draco...

Her fingers flipped the pages before she stopped to consider if this was overstepping her bounds or not. It was just a book, she told herself. Just a book where his family history was laid out detailing their accomplishments and... goodness. Some of the things his ancestors had done... Hermione gulped as she turned the page, unable to stop reading.

The line in this book ended with Abraxas Malfoy, Draco's grandfather. He had not fathered his heir at the time of publication. She saw an older version of someone who looked similar to Draco with white hair instead of blond and a cold, discerning expression on his face. She had a hard time seeing Draco's grinning face in his the longer she stared down at it.

"Look at you, all snuggled up with a book." Draco's voice was condescending yet... playful. Hermione blinked as her eyes adjusted from reading words on a page to trying to read his hidden expression. His long legs bent and he exhaled deeply as he sat down next to her, leaning back against the shelves just as she was. "So, what are we reading about?"

She felt a little strange admitting to him that she had been reading about his family, but how was she supposed to hide it? "You."

Draco's rain grey eyes locked onto hers, studying her and Hermione held him gaze.

"Me."

"You."

"Hmm."

Draco plucked the book from her lap and flipped it closed to read the cover. At the same time he somehow placed his arm around her shoulders, pulling her against him. A frisson passed through Hermione. This was... nice. Draco, with his arm around her. Like... like they were just two people who liked each other. She tried to keep her body from tensing too much with excitement.

"This is shit." He tossed the book on the floor. "Not even an original copy."

"What?"

"It's abridged. The original copies were only given to Pureblood families. They have a lot more..." he turned towards her, smirking in his devilishly handsome way. "Details."

Details? Details that could have more information on the Gaunts? Details that could help Harry?

"What sort of details?"

Draco twirled one of her curls around his finger, watching as it encircled him. "You want to know all my secrets then?" His voice was soft like velvet.

Oh my. The fluttering in her chest was distracting her from her mission of research. Draco was licking his lips and his arm tightened around her, holding her. Yes. Oh yes. This felt amazing. Sitting here, under his arm, with him looking at her like she was the only person on earth with him.

But they weren't. There was a whole world out there and soon it would be caught in the middle of a war. A war where they might very well be on opposing sides.

"What's wrong, Sweetheart?" Draco cooed, running his hand down her arm. How could he be so sweet sometimes and other times... Wait, did she just call Draco Malfoy sweet?

"N-nothing."

Draco's eyes hardened slightly. Fiddlesticks. He knew she was lying. How did he always seem to be able to read her so well?

"What, did you read something about how my great uncle's father's brother's grandfather murdered a few dozen Muggles?" He sat back and rolled his eyes. In almost a second his affection was replaced with aggravation. But he kept his arm around her.

Hermione sat up a little straighter. "No," she sneered.

He cocked his head, looking at her again. "Then what is it, kitten?" he purred. "You seem tense. You know I can help you out with that." His smirk was back and Hermione caught herself smiling back at him.

"I'm not tense. I'm just..." she took a breath. "There's just a lot happening and—" she glanced back up into his face. She couldn't tell him anything about Harry's meeting with Dumbledore. Not if he might become... one of *them* one day. Who knew how long it would take them to hunt down all the horcruxes? "And I'm tired."

"What's wrong?" he asked again, a bit more forcefully this time

He didn't care. He just wanted her to spit it out so he could tell her it was stupid and she should let him make her forget it about it. She didn't want his fake pity. What happened to the guy who couldn't stop sticking his hand up her skirt? Oh. Hermione looked down as Draco placed his hand above her knee, tracing small circles with his index finger. There he was.

"You're not answering me, Granger." His voice was deep again and Hermione felt her resolve beginning to weaken. "I could make you tell me."

Conflicting emotions tumbled around inside her. Harry, Lord Voldemort, Draco, the war, Ron, the Malfoy family, the strange bubbles that kept floating up every time she thought about him, the way she felt when he left her... it all was building up inside her.

"Are you going to break into my mind and find the answer yourself?" she snarled, not exactly sure where her anger was coming from.

Draco pulled back a little, looking confused and... concerned.

"Granger, I—"

"That's what you threatened to do before, isn't it?" Why was she snapping at him? Was she mad at him? Well, yeah. A little. Why did he make her feel so much?

"I... what's this about? Did I do something wrong?"

Hermione sighed. "No. I mean, yes. I mean," she rubbed her forehead. "I'm just stressed about things and I'm tired. I haven't been sleeping well." Her dreams about the Death Eater in the Department of Mysteries was another thing she was placing on the list of things she couldn't ever tell him.

"Can I help?"

"Sorry, Draco, but I'm just not... up for it right now."

"As much as I'd like to fuck you until you couldn't walk tomorrow, I meant do you just want to... I don't know, hang out?"

Wait... *what*? He wanted to hang out? With her? Hermione looked over at him. He looked sincere. And... yeah. She wanted to hang out with him. Maybe spending some time with him, *clothed*, might help her organize some of these emotions.

"You're not just going to get mad at me for something and storm off?" Hermione asked him as a test. If he glared at her or got ruffled by this, there was no way that they could—

Draco grinned. "No, Sweetheart. I'm clean and sober. I'm in much better control of myself when I haven't been drinking."

She narrowed her eyes and pinched her lips, but Draco's returning grin let her know that he had seen through her attempt to look serious. He cared. He cared enough about this to not mess it up. That thought warmed her.

Draco stretched his arm back around her and picked up the copy of "*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*" she had been reading again.

"Find anything interesting in here?" He paged through it a little and Hermione did her best to lean comfortably against him while her blood sang in her veins at the fact that he had his

arm around her *again*.

"Some things, yes. I was almost done with the Malfoy line," she glanced up and saw him watching her carefully. "I had just gotten to erm, your grandfather."

"Abraxas Malfoy," Draco stated and flipped to the page, staring down at the picture of the pointed-faced man. "He died before I was born. Never knew him. But that didn't stop my father from telling me how many times he would have been ashamed of me." Draco's voice turned sour.

Hermione felt a tug on her heartstrings. She remembered seeing Draco with his father at the World Cup and in Diagon Alley. Neither time their interactions had been affectionate, but somehow it was still hard to imagine him being so cold to his only son behind closed doors.

She looked up at him as he ran his finger along the page, reading a bit. His brows hung heavily over his eyes and his mouth tightened. There were so many questions she wanted to ask him, about his father, and his mother, and his life, but instead, Hermione took a page out of Draco's book and placed her hand on his leg.

His granite grey eyes cut to it instantly; watching it like it might unsheathe claws and sink them into him. Well, that was better than treating it like it was something foul. Hermione watched as slowly his expression turned back into its normal impassiveness and he looked back at the book on his lap.

"Twats."

Hermione stifled a giggle. Draco glanced over at her, entertained by her reaction. He stretched out, getting comfortable and pulled her a little closer to him at the same time. The bubbles were rising, filling her up inside with giddiness. Good Godric, when was she ever *giddy*?

He flipped a few more pages, landing on the Nott family tree. "He's the one that wrote this," he said, pointing to a scrawled name on one of the offshoots.

"Cantankerous Nott..." Hermione read aloud, not recognizing the name from any of her history readings.

"Theo's great uncle."

She looked up at him, surprised that he was... talking to her about this. And honestly that he was just talking to her in general.

"Can't fucking stand him," Draco muttered and closed the book back.

"I thought you two were friends." But Draco had knocked him out the other day. He scoffed. Hermione took a breath and added, "I heard what he said. About me."

His rain grey eyes caught hers and he stared at her like he was trying to read the words before she said them.

She went on quietly. "And... you stood up for me."

Draco's jaw clenched slightly. "Yeah, well... No one talks about my girl like that."

His girl. His girl. His girl. Hermione was trying to keep her body from vibrating and melting at the same time.

"You aren't mad that I hit him?"

"Well, I'm not pleased that you resorted to violence as your initial reaction. You could have gotten in trouble again."

"If you want to blow me in another closet all you have to do is say so," Draco said in a dark voice and Hermione swatted him lightly, making him laugh. *Laugh.* It was strange, not his deep chuckle or the cruel laughter she had heard in classes, but it sounded like... him. Like Draco.

He gave her a knowing look. "Now who is being violent?"

"You deserved it." She stuck out her chin.

Draco grabbed it and held it. "I can say whatever I want to about you. Only me, though."

There was a familiar warming and tightening between her legs and she realized she wasn't breathing. *Get it together.* Hermione took a deep breath and swallowed hard before pulling her face away and nervously tucking her hair behind her ears. *His girl.* Her heart thrummed.

"So why are you sitting on the floor in the Restricted Section?" he asked after a moment to which Hermione was grateful for because her mind was spinning so fast she had no idea how to continue this conversation and she so didn't want him to leave, not now that they were.... hanging out.

"Just needed a break from Harry and Ron," she muttered. "Sometimes it's a bit much."

"I can imagine they aren't very good company. Chosen one this and Orphan boy that," he sneered. "And I'm sure Weasley only knows about ten words so I assume conversations are a bit limited when it comes to him."

"Don't insult them." A few bubbles deflated.

He rolled his eyes. "Fine."

Fine? *Fine?* Oh wow. Okay. She took another breath. "Harry has a lot going on in his life. It's not as easy as you think it is."

"Sure. Must be so hard to be everyone's favorite and a Quidditch star and get house points for *breathing*. Poor boy must be exhausted."

"Draco."

"Yes, Pet?"

Hermione blushed. How could he do that? Disarm her so quickly? His grey eyes were gleaming and peering into hers again.

"Let's not talk about them then."

"Best thing you've said all evening," he flashed her another smirk. Hermione rolled her eyes at him this time. "Why don't you tell me where you got that little skirt you were wearing the other night?" His eyes darkened a little.

Hermione dropped her gaze down to her hand, still perched on his leg. There was a time he would have jinxed her for touching him and another time where he would never have allowed such an affectionate gesture. And when had she changed, letting him drape his arm over her and call her his girl?

"I was out by the Lake with Ginny and Luna. Lovegood," she clarified.

"That ditzzy blonde from Ravenclaw?" He screwed up his nose.

"Don't start on Luna."

"Wasn't going to," he muttered.

Hermione narrowed her eyes for a moment, making sure he wasn't going to slide in another snide comment before she went one. "Anyways, we were outside and got caught in the rain. When we got back in we were drying off and Ginny shrunk my uniform."

"And here I thought you were just trying to get my attention."

"Don't I always have your attention?" Hermione played along.

Draco smirked and pushed her coffee curls back from her face. "Yes, pet, you do."

She couldn't help the swelling of pride in her chest. She knew Draco's reputation with girls and the thought crossed her mind that maybe he was always like this with the girls he was with, but then she remembered that none of those girls had lasted long and he had never bothered to do anything to keep them around. Not like with her.

"Well I have to say, I guess I'd rather you keep company with the Weaslette and Looney Lovegood than your regular choices of companions."

Hermione sighed. She wanted to be able to hang out and talk to him, but this was Draco still and just because he liked her didn't mean he was suddenly going to like her friends. And in a way, she understood. She wasn't going to be rubbing elbows with Pansy or Theo anytime soon either.

"At least I don't have to hit my friends." She thought about the little yellow birds she had sent after Ron last term. Draco didn't need to know about that. He'd be too happy.

Draco snorted. "Theo's not my friend. He's a prat." Hermione bit her tongue and instead of asking the questions she wanted to, took a softer approach again and let Draco continue his thought. "He's always envied me. He wanted to be Seeker back when we tried out and moped for weeks after I beat him at tryouts. Girls always liked me better too."

"Hmm."

"He keeps thinking I'm going to take Pansy off of him again."

"Again?"

"Well, because she was mine first."

Mine. Hermione didn't like him referring to another girl as his.

"I just meant I had her first."

“Right.”

Draco sighed. “I’m not going to. Don’t worry. I like you.” He squeezed his arm around her again.

Oh wow, okay. The bubbles were getting bigger, rising up from the pressure that was settling deep in her. He said it so easily this time, almost... too easily. Was she just being paranoid that he was a Slytherin who had no problem lying to get what he wanted? Or could it be possible that he actually did like her? And maybe more?

“Why do you like me?” Hermione asked, trying to clear up some of the thoughts in her head.

Draco was quiet for a moment and she glanced over at him, hoping that he’d let something slip from his cold exterior. “Granger, I...

“I mean, I just sat here and read about your family history. You’ve told me yourself what you think about people like me.”

“It’s... different with you.” He sounded uncomfortable talking about this, but she wanted to know. Needed to know. She had taken a soft approach with him and now it was time to get down to the meat of it.

“Different how?”

Draco looked at her; his rain grey eyes strangely open. She could see the conflict in them and even something that looked a bit like pain. His brows were furrowed in thought and a muscle in his jaw twinged.

“I’m not sure,” he said in a low voice. “You... you make me... fuck. I don’t fucking know.”

Astonishingly enough, she did kind of understand where he was coming from. Her own feelings towards him defied explanation as well. Anyone else and she could logically see how she could arrive here, but the fact that he was Draco Malfoy and she was Hermione Granger made all of this seem unfeasible. Except it wasn’t. This was proof.

“I think I do know,” she said in a small voice. “I’ve tried to reason my way out of this time and time again, but I just...” she sighed and looked up at Draco who was watching her intently. The bubbles burst, popping in her chest. “I like you, Draco. I really like you. I don’t know why, but... I do.”

Her heart was beating *so fast*. They had done unspeakable things together, but this felt more intimate than any of them.

“I know you do, Sweetheart.” Draco cupped her cheek, rubbing his thumb along her cheek before he lightly dragged it over her lips. Her mouth parted just a little and he dipped his thumb inside her lips, placing it in between her teeth.

Hermione tongue brushed against the tip of his tongue and she opened her mouth a little wider. He slid his thumb into her mouth, running it over her tongue. Hermione closed her lips around him and watched as he inhaled sharply and his pupils enlarged until they were only encircled by a ring of silver.

“Merlin, Granger, you’re not in the Entrance Hall now so if you don’t want me to jump you then don’t tempt me.”

She let his thumb pop from in between her lips and they parted in a wide smile. His eyes sparked silver. Hermione felt emboldened by his reaction and their mutual admission of feelings. She was nervous, but plucked up her courage and climbed onto his lap, placing one leg on either side of his.

“Holy shit.”

She settled herself down on top of him, placing her hands on his chest and running them up to his shoulders.

Draco’s hands landed on her thighs and slid up to her waist, which he grabbed onto and pulled her further onto him. “What are you doing to me?” he murmured as he ran his hands up her back making her lean into him.

Burying his face in her neck she heard him breathe in deeply. Hermione threaded her fingers into his hair, pulling him closer and dipped her head down, letting all her loose curls fall around them. Draco groaned deeply and flexed his hips up into her.

“I thought you didn’t want to do anything tonight,” he said in a husky voice.

“You’re not the only one who gets tempted,” Hermione murmured and her body clenched in anticipation.

Draco growled and grabbed her hair in his fist. Yes. She knew what this meant. It would be about three seconds and then Draco was going to shove her down and dive into her. She wanted him, needed him. And in this moment, she felt everything she had not let herself explore. Whatever was in the bubbles spread through her. It was wonderful. It was terrifying.

Hermione pulled back, resting her hands on his shoulders and pushing herself up from him.

“What? What is it?” Draco asked sharply. His chest was rising and falling, his hands still holding her.

She was breathing quickly and her eyes felt wide and dry, but she couldn’t blink. Couldn’t do anything because of the swelling feeling in her chest, her heart.

“Granger, what is going—”

“Why do you still call me Granger?” Her voice was sharper than she meant it to be.

“What?” Draco asked, clearly confused.

Her heart was thundering in her chest, beating with the word she didn’t dare say or even think.

“You never call me by my name.” Why was she doing this? Pushing him away and arguing about this? She knew why, but like *that* word and the feelings attached to it, she was ignoring it.

“What... what does that have to do with anything?” Draco’s tone lowered to match hers. No more breathy whispers, he was arguing back with her like she had known he would.

“You don’t like me,” Hermione shook her head a little. Even though she had liked their playful flirting lately, Draco had still left her with some insecurities. “You just like having sex with me.”

“What?” Draco’s brows were furrowed and frustration clear on his face. “Granger—”

“There it is again,” she snapped. “My name is Hermione.”

He gaped up at her, still straddling his lap. Maybe this wasn’t the best position to try and start a fight in, she thought, but she had to do something to combat the... oh Godric, the way she was feeling right now.

“Okay.”

“So call me Hermione.”

Draco looked like the awkwardness and uncomfortableness was almost causing him pain. He opened his mouth and then closed it, grinding his teeth together.

“Like I thought,” she huffed and pulled herself off of him and back onto the cold floor where she had been before.

“Salazar fucking Slytherin, girl, you’re driving me fucking crazy,” he grumbled and ran his hand through his hair, messing it further.

Hermione straightened out her skirt and frowned down at it. They had been getting along, actually talking and then... and she ruined it. On purpose. Because it was the only way she knew to get that feeling to stop and... and she didn’t want to feel that way for him. Did she? Ugh, it was all too much.

“Do you want me to go?” he asked softly.

Hermione looked over at him. Draco was staring down at the faded red leather copy of *“The Sacred Twenty-Eight”* again. In all honesty no, she didn’t want him to go, but she didn’t know what to do if he stayed either.

“No,” she muttered and picked at her fingers a little.

She thought admitting that might alleviate some of the tension in between them, but no such luck. Draco’s dark expression stayed on his marble face and she tried to remember how to breathe properly because it felt like she was breathing too fast, but then when she tried to slow it down she felt like she wasn’t getting enough oxygen and she tensed up and—

“It’s not just about fucking you,” he said quietly.

Hermione blinked. Okay, this breathing was definitely not normal. “What?” she whispered.

“You heard me, Granger.” His tone was definitive. Solid. Final. His eyes were still on the book.

“What is it about then?” She had to know. Because she knew what was growing in her heart and... she couldn’t keep doing this if—

“You know...” he offered, still not meeting her eyes.

“No, I don’t.” Because maybe he did feel like she did in which case she wanted him to say it. And if he didn’t, and this was just a passing fancy, she could collect what was left of her dignity and... who was she kidding? She couldn’t walk away. He had her. And worst of all, he knew it.

It felt strange, sitting here trying to deal with the fact that she might be falling for him and all he did was admit that it wasn’t all just physical and still refused to call her by her name. Goodness, she was a fool. This was Draco Malfoy for Godric’s sake. Did she really expect him to fall for her too?

His hand snaked around the side of her neck and up to her face, turning her head towards him. She stopped breathing as it wasn’t doing much for her anyways and she met his smoking grey eyes, open and... unguarded. Oh wow... she felt a strange pressure in the front of her head, like something was uncomfortably pushing on her brain. Then a quick, sharp prick of cold. What was—

His lips landed on hers. Usually his kisses were urgent and demanding, but this was different. This was... engulfing. His mouth moved with a tender pressure, slower than normal, but more enveloping. Their lips parted at the same time and his tongue slid into her mouth, pressing against hers before softly pulling it back. He tilted her head back a little farther and shifted closer to her, sliding it back in to softly brush hers again.

Hermione reached out, placing her hand on his side and moving it up a little, feeling the firm muscles beneath his shirt. She felt his breathing change a little at her touch, getting deeper, fuller. He still held her face, but spread his fingers out to cover her neck, around her ear, and into her hair.

He kissed her. And she kissed him back.

Gradually his lips slowed, softly taking her back down from the strange world they had entered. He breathed out deeply, rested his forehead against hers for a moment and swiped his thumb over the top of her cheek before placing one last soft kiss on her lips.

“Now you know,” he murmured, his voice deep, yet strained.

Draco pushed himself up off the floor and dusted his hands off. She could do little else except stare up at him. She had thought it had been too much before, but that kiss... maybe he *did* feel the same. And if he did, what did *that* mean?

Of course. He was going. Hermione blinked and then looked down at her lap again, picking at her nails. If he did feel like she felt, was it so bad then? Would that change things between them? Did she want it to? She bit her lip, thoughts beginning to swirl again.

“Granger.”

Hermione looked up to see Draco’s hand outstretched towards her. Without putting too much thought into it, she reached up and took it. He pulled her easily to her feet.

“You shouldn’t be wandering around by yourself. It’s not... safe anymore. I’ll walk you back.”

The sound of their footsteps was echoed in the empty corridors.

“Uhm, it’s this way,” Hermione said in a small voice as they came to the top of a staircase. Draco corrected himself, glancing at her with wary eyes and then took a step in the direction she had said.

It was the first time either of them had spoken since they left the Library. She wasn’t exactly sure it was a good idea to lead him to the Gryffindor common room, but it’s not like she was giving him the password or inviting him in. Oh goodness... Draco in the common room. Draco in *her* room.

Stop it.

“I can make it from here. It’s not far now,” she said as they came to the edge of the hallway with the Fat Lady’s portrait in it.

Draco looked over her head down the hallway and then back down to her with a smirk. “You don’t want me to know where your common room is?” he asked with a hint of playful sarcasm in his voice.

“It’s just—”

“Afraid I’ll break in and sneak into your bed in the middle of the night?”

Yes.

“No.”

“You should be.”

Oh my.

Draco chuckled a little and trailed a long finger down the back of her hand.

“I’m not scared,” Hermione said, hoping she sounded firm.

“No,” he mused. ‘You’re not, are you?’ His fingers snaked through hers. “My little Gryffindor kitten.”

And with a surge of courage, Hermione looked deep into his stormy grey eyes. “I think I want to do what you said.” She held his gaze as he searched her eyes. Hermione took another breath. ‘I’ll let you... use this,’ she ran her finger along his belt. “To restrain me.”

The energy between them charged in a second. Draco was unnaturally still and then inhaled sharply. His face remained impassive, but his silver eyes burned like they were molten. For a moment she thought he might launch himself at her, but he swallowed hard and she couldn’t help but smile a little at the effect she was having on him even if he tried to hide it.

“Think about that tonight,” she whispered and lifted herself onto her toes and placed a soft kiss on his cheek.

Hermione turned and headed down the hall, glancing behind her a couple times to see Draco standing there, staring at her with disbelief and desire.

21. twenty one

Chapter 21

Okay so... Granger was the girl of his dreams.

Well...

Shit.

At least he had her. It was bad enough that it was a Muggleborn he was falling for, but at least she wanted him too.

Wanted him to tie her up and let him do whatever he wanted to her.

Sweet Salazar, it was all he could think about. She was *burning* in him, making it hard to think, to walk, to even breathe. And not just her body, although he certainly, *definitely*, wanted that, but he wanted it to be like when they were hanging out. He wanted to be able to be around her, wanted to hear her thoughts, wanted to tell her his and make her smile. Just for him.

Was it always like this? Did everyone just walk around with a bloody sun in their chest trying to burst through all the time? He had... been interested in girls before, but this... this was different. Just like her. Merlin, she was... she was everything. Everything he wanted.

If she was a Pureblood, or hell, even something like a second or third generation *Halfblood*, he'd throw his arm around her just like he had the other night, in front of everyone and not even care. Any fallout from her being a Gryffindor or a little less Pure than him he'd deal with. His parents wouldn't be pleased and his reputation would take a hit, but she was worth it.

Most people would be too scared to speak out against him anyways. And he'd shut up the ones that did.

Her friends though... they'd want to kill him. Secretly he wanted to see Weasley's dumb face when he realized that he, Draco fucking Malfoy, had gotten there first.

He imagined watching Weasley staring slack-jawed as Granger leaned up, pushing her fingers into his hair and brushing her soft lips across his cheek to show that fucker she wanted *him*. She loved *him*.

Oh shit.

Love? Is that what he wanted?

Uhm. Maybe?

He had almost found out the other night. It had been wrong, he knew that, but... it was so tempting when she was staring at him with her big doe eyes to just... skim the surface of her

mind. It was entrancing, like nothing he'd ever seen. And for just a second, he had felt the... affection she had for him. It was stronger than he had ever thought.

It was like a warm ray of sun after a cold dark night, easing his troubled soul, making him feel a little less guilty about his own inferno that was roaring in his chest.

He hadn't been able to stay long, she had felt him almost immediately and Granger was clever enough to figure it out if he had tried to push any farther, but that small taste of her... was that love? Whatever it was, it was better than any whisky he had ever tasted and twice as addictive.

He wanted more.

If Granger loved him, it certainly would be easier to get her to come with him. If Granger loved him maybe they could find a way to make all of this work in his world. He'd take care of her, make sure she was safe and wanted for nothing. She could be happy. With him. She could... love him.

And... could he love her? Behind closed doors, where no one else had to know, he could do whatever he wanted with her. He could love... couldn't he? She was still a... *Muggleborn* and he still didn't understand what all this meant. People like her were little better than Muggles, little better than animals, but she was... Granger. Hermione.

Draco closed his eyes. Her-mio-ne. Her name. She had never been Hermione to him. Always Granger. Or... dirty fucking slut or pretty little whore or... he smirked to himself, Sweetheart.

His eyes shot open, staring up into the dark canopy above his bed as he had for the past few hours. What the fuck did it matter what he called her? She still answered to them all. Still did what he wanted her to.

Well if it didn't matter then why couldn't he just call her Hermione like she asked? He clenched his hands into fists. He liked her calling him Draco, after all.

"Draco! Fuck me!" Her whimpering cry echoed in his head.

Fuck.

Fuckkk.

Fuck it.

Draco dipped his hand inside the waistband of his boxer briefs and gripped himself.

Granger popped into his head, each arm and leg tied to a poster of his bed, completely naked and ready for him, like she had been there all along and patiently waiting for him to join her.

Mmm, good girl. He ran his hands up her thighs and over her hips, breathing in deeply as they traced the curve of her waist and up to her chest. She arched her back off the bed, pushing her tits up into his hands as he squeezed them, feeling their soft give under his fingers.

She smiled up at him, batting her lashes and biting her lip. Draco settled himself in between her legs, letting his dick press against her warm center. Her expression changed a little, pulling tight as desire flooded into her dark eyes. She shifted under him, rubbing herself against his length. He pulled his hand over himself with deep, strong strokes.

She felt so good under him. Her skin brushing against his and not shrouded by the darkness like he had been forced to take her in before. Here in his mind there was no mark on his arm and Granger was looking up at him with love and lust burning in her cinnamon eyes. Yes love.

Her curls splayed out on his pillow, her tits jiggling as she squirmed against the ties. Her legs open and sweet little pussy was wet as she lifted her hips, whining for him.

“You can do anything you want to me,” she breathed out. “Anything. Use me. Use me for your pleasure.”

Oh, Granger...

He had her moaning, panting, crying for him. Dipping himself slowly into her, he took his time on her. Granger was desperate, bucking her hips up and trying to get more of him, but Draco continued at a slow pace, enjoying the look of wanton desperation on her face.

Her pleas did nothing to dissuade him, only made him pinch her little pink nipples to make it even more intense for her.

Fuck, this felt so good. He pushed his underwear down on his legs, fully freeing himself and allowing his eyes to close again as the image of Granger surged forward.

“Draco! Oh, Draco, yes! Yes, please, please!”

He crashed his lips onto hers, taking her words, her breath, her tongue and sunk himself as deep as he could in her. As slow as he had gone before, now he was making up for it, pounding himself into her mercilessly as she screamed under him, writhing in the throes of pleasure.

Draco felt his body tense and his hand pumped faster. He grabbed onto her throat, applying just enough pressure as to make her gasp with a high pitched noise and her cinnamon eyes to fly open and oh— Fuck!

He stifled a deep groan as he came, head pulling up off the pillow and he stopped breathing until he had shot himself over his stomach.

Fuck... Hermione... Yes.

He gasped in a large breath, filling his chest with air again.

Oh shit.

That was...

Woah.

Draco wiped himself off with his boxers and turned aside to throw them out when he saw a pair of dark eyes watching him from the bed next to his.

Pansy.

She was on her side, the sheet lightly lying over her curvy form and her hand was curled in front of her face. Theo was snoring next to her.

Draco paused, balled up boxers in hand as they stared at each other for a moment.

"I know what you were doing," Pansy's dark eyes glittered.

"I didn't know I had an audience," Draco said drolly, reaching down to shove the boxers under his bed.

"Mystery girl not doing it for you anymore?"

He smirked at her before shoving his pillow under his head again, breathing out deeply. Draco stared up at the ceiling of his canopy again, smiling a little to himself. Granger had most definitely done it for him. "Goodnight, Pansy."

He heard her blow out a quick breath and then tossed herself over, turning her back on him.

His mind turned back to the conflicting thoughts he had been debating for the better part of the night. He'd hoped that wanking would have helped him get to sleep but after another half hour of not getting anywhere other than more lost in his own head he landed back on imaging Granger this time bent over and strapped down.

Draco groaned as he felt his cock twitch. She shook her ass at him, making small noises in her throat as she pulled at the restraints. He rubbed his hand over her round cheek, bringing his fingers down to her warmth.

"Please, sir," she whined. "Fuck my pussy."

Well, he wasn't sleeping tonight anyways. Draco glanced over to make sure Pansy was still turned away and then slid his hand back under the sheet.

He rested his head in his hand during Transfiguration, fighting his heavy lids trying to close. He had gotten a couple hours of sleep before he had to get up again. It was tempting to roll over and stay in his bed this morning, but he had missed so many classes already and the last thing he wanted was Snape to come looking for him again.

Plus, he'd miss out on seeing her.

Granger had her hair pulled back today, probably because of the heat. It was already permeating the normally cool castle even early in the morning. The sun was shining into one of the large windows across from him and Draco squinted, trying to block out the blinding light while still keeping his eyes on her.

She looked hot with her hair up and Draco smirked as he imagined grabbing it and pulling hard as he fucked her over her desk.

She had left her sweater behind today, wearing only her white button down shirt and pleated skirt. This shirt was loose, hiding her sloping sides and her skirt hung over her knees.

Draco vaguely wondered if she had kept the shrunken uniform or fixed it back to its regular length already.

He'd have to ask. Then he'd fuck her in it.

Or, he could buy her something to wear for him.

Granger in lace.

Granger in leather.

Granger in a long, fine gown, jewels dripping down her neck.

Ugh. He had to stop that line of thinking. He'd done enough of that last night.

He needed to go back and work on the Cabinet; that's what he should have done last night when he couldn't sleep instead of sitting there, thinking about her, and beating off when he couldn't get her out of his head.

He had been avoiding the Cabinet. A cold creeping guilt burrowed deep within him, knowing he was condemning his father to a longer imprisonment and shirking in his duties to his Lord. But... the idea of pointing his wand, saying those words, and ending a man's life made him feel like the earth under him was suddenly gone and he was falling into the vastness of the sky.

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

Nothing under him.

Granger under him.

Mmm, Granger... *Hermione*...

"Wake up!" Blaise hissed and Draco jerked up, eyes opening wide. McGonagall was giving him a harsh look down her nose and he cleared his throat, sitting up and trying to clear his head.

Blaise shook his head, glaring at him before turning back to the front of the class. McGonagall started her lecture again and Draco folded his arms over his chest, leaning back. Maybe changing positions would help him stay awake.

A few minutes later and he was pulling his head up after his chin hit his chest for the second time. How was he going to make it through the day? And even if he did, there was no way he was going to be able to work on the Cabinet tonight either. That meant two nights he wasted, not to mention the night before last that he spent with Granger in the Library so really three.

Fuck.

He was running out of time. And if the end of the year came and he didn't have the Cabinet finished, he would just have to off the old man and then try to get out as quickly as he could. Maybe fly? But Aurors were watching the borders and he didn't think he'd make it far into the Forest on foot with only a wand.

And even if he could somehow get out, how the hell was he supposed to take Granger with him then? No, it had to be the Cabinet. He'd sleep tonight, no matter what, and then tomorrow spend every spare minute in the Room of Hidden Things and he would fix the damn Cabinet one way or another because it was his only hope of keeping Granger at his side.

And of course, commit a murder in the meantime.

Hermione stared into the low fire lighting the common room. Another evening full of heavy conversation with Harry and Ron about Horcruxes, Death Eaters, and Lord... Voldemort. She swallowed. It was getting easier, she thought, to say his name. Maybe.

Ron had already gone to bed, but Harry had stayed downstairs with her, staring into the same dark coals as she was. The low light reflected off of his glasses and dark hair, giving him a strangely haunted look.

"Harry?"

He turned towards her.

"What are we going to do?" She leaned over, resting her head on his shoulder.

Harry sighed deeply, as if he had been holding the breath in all night. "I don't know. I still feel like there's so much I don't know. Everything I find out... it just leads to more questions."

"I'm sorry I haven't helped more." She had spent so much time worrying about Draco she felt like she hadn't devoted as much of herself as she normally could to helping Harry. "Is there anything I can do?"

"I wish you believed me," he said a little bitterly and she lifted her head. "About Malfoy."

Her heart clenched in her chest.

"I know there's something going on with him. He's not acting normally. He doesn't hang out with his friends anymore, he's missing sometimes... I know you've been busy with all your classes so you haven't really noticed, but I have."

The guilt clawed into her. She knew exactly where he was going. She knew what he was doing. She knew why he was pulling away from his friends and sneaking off. But she couldn't tell Harry.

Hermione looked at him, at the concern etched on his face and the earnestness there. He wanted her to believe him so much, but... she couldn't. She knew Draco and he wouldn't... he wasn't a Death Eater. Not him.

Not the one who had kissed her the other night in the Restricted Section. Not the one who wanted to hang out with her because she was upset. Not the one who called her *my girl*. Not her Draco.

He wouldn't do that. He was confused, he had said so himself. He had been raised a certain way, but he... cared about her. He didn't treat her like a Mudblood anymore, he didn't

act like she was less than him. Maybe... maybe he wouldn't end up like his father after all. Maybe Draco would choose his own path.

And maybe she could share it with him.

"What does Ron say about all this?" she asked, not wanting to get lost in thoughts of Draco as she so often did these days. But the blooming in her chest, well, there was nothing she could do about that.

Harry leaned back into the couch. "He doesn't think Malfoy is smart enough to be a Death Eater. But he's crafty, you know? He figured out how to get into the Room of Requirement during our D.A. meetings last year and no matter how much I try I can't get in to see whatever he's doing in there," he grumbled.

"You've tried to get in?" she asked in a breathy voice. Oh God... the idea of Harry walking in on her and Draco...

"Every chance I've gotten, but no luck. Whatever he's doing in there, he's using the Room's magic to shield it. It must be something awful if he's going to this much trouble."

"Yes, it must," she said softly, doing her best to keep her head above the deep water of her dark thoughts. He was using the Room for something else too. She had run into him enough on the seventh floor landing to know that and he seemed very comfortable using the Room's magic when he had created certain experiences for her.

Maybe Harry was onto something, but... he was probably just... she frowned. What was he doing in there?

"I've got to get bed. We've got practice tomorrow for the Ravenclaw match and if I stay up any longer I'll be useless."

"It is late." Strangely enough she had gotten used to staying up late, having had to do so so many times recently.

"Thanks for talking about all this with me again."

"Of course, Harry, you're my best friend. I'll always be here for you."

Harry smiled at her. "I don't know what I'd do without you, Hermione."

She smiled back. "You'll never have to find out. Like it or not you're stuck with me. I'm not going anywhere."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Draco's voice was low, but soft.

Hermione took a shaking breath and nodded. "Yes."

He moved to the side and she saw the same velvet chaise that he had conjured for her before. The fur pillow was resting against the scrolled side and the matching blanket draped over the back again. Her heart beat a little faster.

Draco's touch was cool as it trailed down her spine to rest on the small of her back. She could feel the excitement coming off him in waves, crashing against her own nerves, which

were buzzing and humming under her skin.

She wanted to do this, but... it was farther than they had ever gone before. She had slept with him. She had done things with him she couldn't even say out loud, so why did this feel so different?

Because she was going to have to trust him. Completely.

She'd be tied up and he'd... he'd be able to do anything to her. But he wouldn't humiliate her, right? He cared about her. He liked her. He wouldn't let anything happen to her because... because she was his girl.

The act itself was appalling, still, Draco made her feel special, wanted, adored in a way that no one else did. Even when he called her dirty names, they were never to hurt her, they were... for him.

And maybe... a little for her too, if she was being *really* honest with herself.

And maybe that was why she was equal parts nervous and excited about the prospect of being restrained and letting him have free reign over her. She could spend hours puzzling it out and probably come up with some logical reasoning as to why, but the fact remained that Hermione wanted to do this and she wanted to do this with him.

"I've charmed it," Draco spoke in that same soft low voice. 'My belt. Once it's on you,' he glanced nervously at her, "if you say a passphrase it will come undone. And I'll stop too."

She supposed that made her feel a little better, but her nerves were still ringing violently and all she did was nod again as she stared at the small waves in the velvet.

"What word do you want to use?"

She looked back at him. "Oh... I... I don't know."

Draco kept his stormy grey eyes on hers. "I want you to choose. That way you won't forget, like the ankle thing. If it gets too much—" he stopped and cast his eyes down. "If *I* get too much you'll need to stop me."

She stared wide eyed at him.

"Granger, I want this. I need this. With you." He lifted his eyes back up to hers again. "It's going to feel *so good*, pet, I promise, but... you've got an out if you want it."

"Out."

Draco nodded solemnly.

"That can be my word. I'll remember that. Out."

His eyes lit up and darkened all at the same time and she took another wavering breath.

"So I'll stop if you say 'out' and the belt will fall off. Understand?"

She dropped her eyes and nodded. Her mind and body were having very opposite reactions right now.

Draco reached out and took her hands in his. "You're shaking," he murmured, running his thumbs over the backs of her hands. "Are you scared?"

Hermione looked up into his rain grey eyes and breathed out. "Not with you."

"Oh Sweetheart," his voice was hoarse and he moved his hands over her, one at the curve in her back and the other behind her neck. Sweetheart. It wasn't Hermione, but... it would do. His actions meant more than what he called her anyways. Maybe Granger and Sweetheart were as close as he could get for right now.

Their bodies were pressed together and she could smell his combination of mint and fresh parchment. Hermione took a deep breath, inhaling him and letting it calm her. Draco. The only one she'd ever let do anything like this to her. Because he was the only one she ever wanted doing anything to her. Because she loved... this. With him.

She could admit that at least.

"Have you ever done this before?" she whispered.

Draco's face lost all emotion. "Not... like this."

"What do you mean?"

Something dark moved behind his eyes.

"Pansy has a thing about ropes and none of the others..." His tone matched his expression and she knew that was all she was getting out of him right now. Plus, she wasn't really curious about Pansy's sexual preferences or what he'd done with the other girls.

"Are you ready?" he asked after another minute and Hermione bit her lip. Draco tilted her face up to his, placing two fingers under her chin so that she was looking right into his eyes again. Oh how she wished she could read his expressions, but as always, Draco's face was a picture of stony stoicism.

"As I'll ever be."

He smirked. "I'll take that as a yes. Now take off your clothes."

This was it. Hermione's hands were still shaking as she started on the buttons of her shirt. She let it fall to the floor, soon followed by the rest of her clothes. As she stepped out of her skirt, she wrapped her arms around herself.

"At your sides."

She forced her arms back to her sides and sucked in a quick breath. She felt heat rush into her face and he dragged his eyes over her, taking in her bare body, exposed for him.

"Get on your knees."

Hermione knelt down in front of him, her heart racing with apprehension and anticipation. Somehow, Draco giving her commands was making this easier. Maybe because she didn't have to think about what to do next or maybe because it made her feel wanted... Either way, she was obeying.

“Take my belt off.” He was going to make her do it. She looked up at him; Draco was clearly enjoying this the same way he had enjoyed making her admit she wanted him to kiss her when they first started all this. She reached up but as soon as her fingers touched the black leather he swatted her hands away. “No, pet. With your mouth.”

Oh dear Godric... He was really making the most of this. Hermione opened her mouth and gingerly placed her teeth on his belt, tasting the leather and pulled it from the silver buckle. His gaze was intense, but oddly enough it made her feel better about doing this. She softly bit the bit of belt beside the buckle and pulled it, hearing the black leather snake through each of his belt loops until the length of it was hanging from her mouth.

“Good girl.” Draco smirked down at her and brushed his fingers through a few curls. Hermione smiled around the belt still in her mouth. She wasn’t going to drop it until he told her to. She was a good girl. *His* good girl.

Draco held out his hand and she placed the belt into it, feeling the nerves start to dissipate as desire began to spark up in her.

“Get up.”

Hermione got to her feet.

“Walk over to the chaise and bend over the end of it.”

Her legs were loose under her and for a moment she was worried they would not hold her, but soon she was in front of the large scrolled arm and the chaise and she glanced up at Draco who gave her a small nod before she leaned over it and waited for him.

Resting her weight on her forearms, Hermione bent her head down, letting her thick curls fall around her face. She heard Draco walking behind her and inhaled sharply as he placed his hand on her ass, rubbing her cheek and gripping it slightly.

“Your ass is mine.”

A shiver ran down her spine, bringing with it the warmth of arousal.

“Spread your legs. Wider,” he prompted when he was not pleased with her initial stance.

“Hands.”

Oh. This was it. Last chance to turn away.

Hermione breathed in and slowly brought her hands around her back. Draco grabbed her wrists with one hand and pressed them roughly together, his fingers digging into her. She heard the belt slither before she felt him wrap it around her wrists, binding them together tightly. She was his.

Her lower stomach clenched and she moved on the chaise a little, shifting her weight since she could no longer support herself on her own.

“Do you have any idea how sexy you look right now?” Draco said in a husky voice. “Ass up, hands tied... but I want to see your face.”

He leaned over her and she turned her head to the side. Draco pushed her caramel curls out of the way, pulling them over her shoulder until she could see him out of the side of her eye.

His black shirt was hanging open and his pale chest exposed. What she would give to have five minutes to explore his body.

“There,” he stood up straight again. “Now, we can start.”

Hermione’s whole body was tense with anticipation. Draco rubbed his hand over her backside again, this time bringing his fingers down in between her legs. He explored her softly, rubbing two fingers inside her fold, spreading her slickness over her. Hermione did her best to stay still, knowing that if she fidgeted too much, he would punish her.

But... that was enticing too.

Hermione wiggled a little against his fingers, pushing herself back to extend his touch.

“Eager, are we?” She could hear the smirk in his voice, laced with an aristocratic drawl. He chuckled and pulled his hand away. The sound died and was replaced by a low moan and smack of lips. “You taste so good.”

Good Lord. She was melting, turning into a puddle of desire, longing, and lust. He’d barely touched her and her blood was already surging.

His hands slid from her ass down her legs as he crouched behind her. There was a low growl of approval and she felt his breath against her. “Oh Granger...” he ran his nose along the inside of her thigh. She tried not to shake too much, but it was near impossible.

Draco pushed her open with his fingers and gave another low noise. “Such a pretty pussy... and all for me.”

A little whimper escaped her and Hermione moved ever so slightly back, hoping that it would be enough to reach him.

A sharp slap to her ass made her jump and push forward again. “Stay still,” he growled and grabbed her hips before biting down hard on one of her cheeks.

She cried out as sweet pain shot through her, but Draco quickly followed it with a soft kiss to the spot he had just sunk his teeth into then continued to trail the kisses down to her center.

Yes yes yes. He hovered right behind her; she could feel his breath billowing across her and... Oh God yes... he kissed her, sliding his hands down to her thighs to hold onto her and let his tongue snake forward to slip inside her fold.

This was heavenly. He swiped it over her, alternating between long soft laps and sharp small licks. Her thighs were shaking on either side of him as she panted, pulling at the ties around her wrists and squirming. Draco moaned as he wrapped his lips around her clit, flicking his tongue against it again and again.

The pressure was building up inside her quickly. Her legs stiffened and she tried to bring them together, but Draco held them firmly open, voraciously indulging in her.

She cried out, voice shaking, ready for the burst of pleasure and—

He laughed. Hermione sunk against the chaise, body still tense and ready for her release but... he had pulled away. He wasn’t giving it to her. No, no... not this again!

He blew a cool stream of air against her and Hermione whimpered, pushing herself back towards him again, hoping that he would take mercy on her and finish what he started.

He smacked her ass. Hard. "Fucking whore."

She heard him stand up and did her best to look back at him, mostly just seeing his outline from her compromised position.

"Draco... please!"

He was stroking himself lightly and the thought that he had been doing that while he was eating her out made another frisson pass through her.

"I stayed up for hours thinking of all the different ways I could make you come the other night." He walked around to her head. "And unfortunately, I wasn't able to make up my mind. So I'm just going to have to do this the old fashioned way."

"What's that?" she said breathily.

Draco leaned down until he was eye to eye with her. "Try them all." She panted and Draco grinned at her, obviously pleased with her reaction. "Or maybe I should spank your ass raw and fuck you fast and hard, hmm? Which would you prefer? A slow torture or a quick beating?"

How was he able to make something so terrible sound so good? And... how was she supposed to choose?

"Both. I want both."

Draco's eyes clouded with lust. "Oh kitten," his voice was as soft as the velvet she was laying on. "That's what I was hoping you would say."

Draco pulled her face up and kissed her hard. She could feel his urgency and need for her as he snaked his tongue into her mouth and held her face in his hands. Sucking in a harsh breath he finally broke away from her and let her fall back down.

"Mmm, still so wet." Draco's hand moved over her backside down in between her legs again and Hermione inhaled deeply.

The air came rushing out of her along with a small scream when his first smack was not against her ass at all, but *there*.

"Draco! Oh my God!"

He chuckled and rubbed his cool fingers over her. "That's for that short little skirt and this—" he brought his palm against her again. "Is for climbing off of me the other night."

Hermione was whimpering. It hurt, but the aftershock of it was incredible. He hadn't slapped her as hard as he did when he spanked her, but enough to make her entire center quiver with pleasure and pain.

"Feel good, doesn't it, Sweetheart? You like the pain."

As always, he was right about her. Hermione nodded quickly and he rubbed his hand back up over her backside again.

“And I like giving it to you.”

His palm stung as it hit her ass. This was different from the first time he spanked her. It wasn't as harsh, but it went on *much* longer. He grunted as he smacked her, palm ringing against her tender skin. Hermione jumped every time he struck her and on especially hard ones, she heard Draco chuckle a little as she whimpered or gasped.

She wasn't sure how much more she could take, but after each strike something deep in her fell away until the skin of her backside was sore and burning under his merciless palm. She loved it.

She moaned, biting her lip against the sweet pain. Her hands were balled into fists, straining against his belt and she winced, waiting for his next smack when he rubbed both of his hands over her sore cheeks and blew out a low breath.

“How's that feel?” he asked softly, continuously running his hands over her, calming her inflamed skin.

Hermione gulped. “Good.” She took a few large breaths. “I'm okay.”

“You're goddamn perfect is what you are,” he said hoarsely and knelt behind her again, placing soft kisses over her sore cheeks until the pain faded a little. Her breathing evened out and Hermione began to relax a little as Draco softly ran his hands over her, every now and then placing his lips against her with a controlled gentleness.

“I don't think I can fuck you like this.” She felt him stand up.

“What? No! Draco...” Hermione twisted, trying to look more behind her. He better not leave her wanting again or she was going to—

“Don't worry, kitten, I just mean this way. Your ass is... shit, it's beautiful but if I fuck you from behind it's going to hurt. Bad.”

“Since when do you have any problem hurting me?” Hermione quipped. His treatment of her after had been so gentle and... loving even. It had calmed not only her soreness, but her mind as well, letting deeper emotions well up. The feeling left over from the popped bubbles had not gone away. In fact it had only grown and after that display of kindness and affection, she felt it expanding in her chest.

“I like making you scream my name with *pleasure*, Granger,” he said as he moved around to her head again. “Plus, I haven't gotten to play with your tits.”

He picked her up and she winced against the pain still lingering from his hand. Shifting her around they ended up with Draco sitting on the chaise and Hermione on his lap, legs on either side of him, just as they had been in the Library, but with her hands still bound behind her back. The belt was tight around her wrists and after all her wiggling it was biting into her skin some. She twisted her arms a little, getting a modicum of relief and looked down to see Draco smirking up at her, silver eyes shining darkly.

From this position she had a good view of his chest and muscles which was something he hadn't often shared with her. Was it some sort of hard line with him? She made a mental note to ask him later, right now she just wanted to enjoy the view.

She felt his hard length under her and Hermione shifted on his lap a little, getting it in the exact right spot before she moved her hips back and forth, rubbing against it.

Draco placed his hands on her waist lightly and groaned as his head fell back to rest against the chaise. "Oh fuck, Granger, your pussy's good enough to make me come and I'm not even inside it."

Hermione couldn't help but smile a little at this. She loved the way he talked to her, saying dirty things to make her blush, but knowing that she secretly loved it. Maybe... he'd like it if she said some things to him too.

"I love how your cock feels." Draco's eyes shot open, locking onto hers with intensity. "Mmm, Draco, I love what you do to me, what you've made me."

His hands tightened on her, pushing her harder against him. "You like being my little whore?" His voice was raspy, as if he was barely able to talk.

Hermione nodded eagerly, moving faster so that her breasts shook in front of him. "I love it," she moaned and threw her head back. "Oh God, I love it!"

"Stop," he gasped. "Stop, Granger, oh fuck..." He held her up and pushed her back to where she was sitting on his legs.

Hermione glanced down, worried that she had done something wrong. Draco's face was drawn in concentration and she let her eyes fall to his groin. His dick was jumping and he let out a small moan.

"Draco, are you okay?" she asked, worried about him. His hands were shaking on her sides and the muscles of his abdomen were twitching uncontrollably.

He pulled his bottom lip into his mouth and bit down hard on it. Closing his eyes tightly, Draco nodded. Eventually he exhaled and opened his eyes. They looked like ash covered coals, burning up into her.

He took a few large breaths and she waited patiently for some sort of explanation as to what just happened. "You're not getting out of this that easy." He grinned at her.

"What?"

Draco pulled her forward again, but made sure to keep his dick from in between her legs. "Trying to make me come before I even get to fuck you?" He shook his head in disapproval. "If I hadn't already spanked you, I'd bend you over my knee for that."

"I didn't... I was just—"

He pulled her against his chest and inhaled deeply. "I like hearing those naughty things come from these sweet lips." He tapped a finger against her partially open mouth.

Hermione felt her courage spark up. "And here I thought you just liked putting things in them."

He smirked at her and ran a hand up into her hair, pulling her face down to his. Right before their lips met he whispered, "If you keep talking like that, I'm never going to untie you. I'll leave you locked up in here for my personal use."

Hermione gave a small whimper and bit her lip. It felt wrong being... turned on by that, but she couldn't help it. Once again, Draco made it just sound *so good*...

His other hand had found its way in between her legs again and she stifled a gasp as he traced his finger in circled around her clit, teasing her again.

"Draco..." she moaned.

He slid his hand further down and dipped his fingers just barely into her entrance. Hermione immediately tried to sink down on them, but he grabbed a fistful of her hair and stopped her.

"You little slut..." his grey eyes gleamed. 'You just can't help yourself can you?' He swiped his thumb over her clit and Hermione let out a high whine. "I know, kitten," Draco cooed. "Your little pussy needs to be fucked, doesn't it?"

She nodded as best she could with him still holding onto her hair and bit her lip as he ran his thumb in a circle around her.

"I want to watch you fuck yourself on my hand." Back to the low, commanding voice that she loved. "Your little clit is so swollen. I know you must need to come so bad. But you're not going to, understand? Not until I say so."

Rules. She could follow rules. Probably.

"Good girl," he smirked and let go of her hair. Leaning back, Draco's smirk widened. "Now you may start."

Permission. Why was that so... hot? Right now she didn't care. Hermione pushed down and felt his fingers slide up into her. Instantly she tightened around them, her body already knowing what it wanted.

She rocked her hips back and forth, moving herself over his fingers. Draco's eyes moved over her body, watching her breasts bounce, her hips grind, and his fingers disappear inside her over and over.

Draco curled his fingers inside her and she moaned as they hit something, making her shake.

"Don't come," he warned. "Or I'll smack your tits this time."

Oh... that was... intriguing. But no, she would follow his rules and be a good girl. For him. Hermione gathered herself as best as she could and kept grinding against his hand, feeling the pressure starting to build up in her again.

He wiggled his fingers back and forth in her and Hermione cried out, stopping as she started to shake, willing her body to obey.

The trembling subsided and she was left gasping and panting.

"Good girl," Draco cooed, running his other hand into her hair, petting her. She leaned her head into it. "My good little slut."

She tightened around him again.

“Oh?” He smirked. “You like that? You like being called a slut?”

Hermione closed her eyes as she started moving herself again. “Yes.”

Draco gave a low appreciative noise. “Because you are. Such a dirty... desperate... slut.”

She swallowed, opening her mouth to gasp in more air. Draco’s hand moved down to her neck, fingers spreading out around it.

“Do you want to come, slut?”

“Yes!” She cried out. Oh God, she wanted that more than anything.

Draco rubbed his thumb down the column of her throat. “But you look so good like this... pleasing yourself with my hand. Does it feel better than yours?”

“Yes,” she said breathlessly.

“Do you love it?” His eyes were boring into hers.

“Oh yes...”

He smirked. “More than my mouth?”

Oh God... he was moving his thumb against her clit again.

“No,” she moaned.

“No?” Draco grinned. “You like getting your pussy licked?”

“I love it,” she sped up a little. It was dangerous, but oh God, it felt so good.

“So do I kitten.”

She wasn’t going to be able to take much more. Especially when he was talking like this. Hermione could feel the cold silver of his ring against her as she pushed his fingers deeper in her.

“I want you inside me.” She wasn’t going to be able to stop this one when it rose up in her. Tonight had been too much and she wanted this too badly. Her only option was to make him give in.

Draco growled happily. “Why?”

“Because I love it,” she was panting, curls brushing against her cheeks as she ground herself on his hand. He was starting to breath hard himself and she knew she was getting to him.

“What do you love?”

If saying it meant she finally got a release, fine. She had surrendered her dignity to him long ago.

“I love your cock, Draco. Please... let me have it.”

He groaned and ran his hand down her arm to the belt around her wrists, pulling on it and making her sit up straighter and he pulled his hand from her.

Hermione cried out.

“Draco! No! Please! Oh God, please, Draco... please...”

He pushed her back a little and she felt something else at her entrance. Something bigger than his fingers.

“Yes yes yes! Thank you!”

“Easy,” he warned, but grinned wide at her. “Just the tip at first. I’ll guide you onto it.” He placed his hands on her hips and lined himself up with her.

Hermione nodded although she wanted nothing more than all of him right *now*. Slowly he pulled her down onto him and she felt him open her. Draco hissed and she saw his muscles harden into carved lines across his body.

“Look at me.”

Hermione met his storming grey eyes, intense and strong with large, dark pupils. The pressure inside her was growing. Oh... Godric... she wasn’t going to be able to stop it. She felt something else... something behind her eyes again. She tried to focus on controlling herself, but it was all too much.

“You love it?”

“Yes.”

He pushed a little farther in. This was torture. He pulled back a little and slid the same length back in. She couldn’t even see straight right now. Strange things kept coming up in her mind. The other night in the Library, their reconciliation in the bathroom.

“Fuck, you’re so tight.”

“Please... more...”

Then the Forest and the way she felt when she kissed him there. Pulling away from Ron.. What? Why was she thinking about that? Draco’s eyes came into focus and she was able to see properly again. He moved himself back and forth again. So close, so close.

“You love fucking my cock?”

“Yes...” she moaned.

Another inch. Draco Draco Draco. It was all him. Over and over. Flashes of him in class, hovering over her, kissing her, inside her, his arm around her, grinning at her, and then... the sudden burst of popped bubbles.

Hermione let out another high moan as he slid himself out and then back in again. Everything fell away from her brain as it quieted down to only the parts that could feel this. Feel him.

“You love me?”

“Ye—” Hermione stopped and her eyes opened wide, staring down into his storming grey.

Draco slammed her hips down onto him, burying himself in her.

Hermione cried out as her orgasm rippled through her. She couldn't even think about what he had just asked her because her brain was exploding with fireworks and bliss and everything that she had been denied so far tonight. She couldn't move, couldn't breath, couldn't do anything but feel *this*.

"Fuck, Granger!" Draco swore and she felt something deep in her.

His fingers dug into her hips hard and she opened her eyes just enough to see his face pull tight and his grey eyes burn up into hers like ash covered coals.

"Fuck," he said weakly. 'Oh shit,' his body convulsed and she felt it again. He groaned and then his muscles released, easing back down only to jump and twitch randomly. "Fuck!"

Hermione blinked in understanding.

He pulled her from him and looked up at her with wide, wary eyes, either not bothering to mask his anxiety or... not able to.

"Shit, Granger," he exhaled deeply. "I don't... that's never... I've always been able to pull out. Fuck. *Fuck*."

"Draco," Hermione tried to sound as calm as she could. "Draco, it's okay."

He made no effort to hide the confusion on his face.

"I... I'm safe. I take a potion."

"What?" he breathed out.

"Ginny convinced me to start recently. It's not important right now," she shook her head, not wanting to bog him down with the details. After their... talk, Ginny had suggested it and Hermione had been embarrassed she hadn't brewed one earlier. "But... you don't have to worry."

He breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Thank fuck." He blinked a few times, staring up at the ceiling. She watched the lump in his throat bob up and down. "For a second there..." he glanced back at her. "Yeah, that's... that's smart of you. The last thing I need is a halfbreed running around—"

Hermione's face fell. Not that she wanted that either, but Godric, *halfbreed*?

"Shit, Granger, I didn't mean—"

"Untie me. Now."

Draco reached around her and in a perverse embrace pulled his black leather belt from around her wrists.

Her arms were sore. Now that she could move them, she could feel the stiff muscles and the tender skin at her wrists. Hermione tried to stand up, but Draco caught her hands in his and pulled her back.

"Draco," she sighed, exasperated, sliding off him to sit on the seat beside him.

Draco shifted to face her. "Please—" He rubbed his fingers lightly over her wrists, massaging them.

Hermione looked up into his eyes again. He still hadn't retreated behind his marble mask yet and he looked... contrite. Draco pulled the fur blanket down off the back of the chaise and wrapped it around her then started working his hands up her arms. His hands were strong, but his touch was tender. She didn't really want him to touch her right now, but honestly it was helping the soreness dissipate under his practiced fingers.

"I didn't... I'm sorry. I don't think you're—" Draco stopped talking and looked down at her wrists and the red lines where the belt had held them.

She didn't know what to say. Where would she even start?! With halfbreed, or the fact that he just came in her, or that he asked her if she... loved him? And that she might have almost said—

"It just came out." He was looking down, now running his hands up her forearms, rubbing his fingers into the stiff muscles there.

"What did?" Hermione snapped.

He looked up at her, eyes large. "Well," he tried to make his face into something like a smile. He was obviously nervous. "A few things."

Hermione glared at him and pulled her arms away from him.

"Granger—"

"Hermione," she corrected.

It always came back to this. She was a Muggleborn and he was a Pureblood. No, he was a Purist. One of the people who cared about blood purity and the social structure that was based on it. He might care about her, but he cared about his blood more.

"I'm an asshole. I know that. I know... how I treat you sometimes and I know how I," he paused, "how I want to treat you."

Hermione's mouth fell open. This was not at all what she was expecting.

"I'm not as smart as you, I don't have all this," he waved his hand in between them, "figured out. But I'm trying."

Oh wow. This was... was what she had secretly longed to hear him say, but never even let herself contemplate it. It was crazy to even entertain the idea that Draco might change his mind about her. That he might turn away from the way he was raised. That he might... love her?

"It's complicated," he frowned.

"I know."

"No," he let out a mirthless laugh. "You have no idea. You don't know—" he stopped, glancing at her again. Then he pulled his shirt closed and started to button it back up.

Hermione pulled the fur blanket around her some more. Sore was an understatement, but so was relaxed. How was it possible for her body to feel two such different things at the same time? The irony of this was not lost on her.

"I'm sorry," he said again, turning towards her. "There was a lot going on and it just came out. If it makes you feel any better I don't use... that word anymore. The one you didn't want me to say. Well, once, but... that was another emotionally charged situation."

Hermione accepted this information, not really sure what to do with it. "And this was... emotionally charged?"

"Well yeah," he ran his hand through his white blond hair. "I had just come in you, for Salazar's sake, I thought I—"

"Love me?"

Draco went impossibly still, his expression carved carefully from cold marble. Hermione held her own. She wasn't backing down, not this time.

Draco's eyes darted back and forth between hers. "Do you?"

"*Do you?*" she retorted. He always turned things around on her, well, not this time.

"I... I don't know."

Oh goodness...

Draco looked like he might be sick. He was pale and a faint sheen of sweat was on his forehead.

"I told you, I don't have this figured out."

Hermione wasn't breathing. How many more life altering things were going to happen before she had a chance to process even *one* of them?!

He stood up on shaky legs and walked over to where his trousers were discarded on the floor. He slid his legs into them and then gathered her clothes up for her and brought them over to the chaise before awkwardly sitting down next to her again.

"I didn't mean to fuck tonight up."

She had almost finished dressing and was slipping her shirt back on when he finally spoke. She took a break from the buttons to look over at him.

"Do you really not say Mudblood anymore?" she asked softly.

Draco shook his head, elbows resting on his knees and eyes trained on the floor.

"Why?"

His jaw clenched. "You really want to know?"

"Yes."

He turned towards her and looked... scared. "Because you asked me not to."

Oh.

Oh.

"Don't fucking look at me like that," he snarled.

Hermione pulled back, not really sure *how* she had been looking at him. But now? She was smiling.

"I really like that."

Draco glanced at her from the side of his eye and then slowly turned to face her. "Yeah?"

She nodded, curls bouncing around her face. "Yeah."

His lips twitched. "I called them Muggleborns in front of Blaise. I'm pretty sure he thinks I'm under some enchantment" She giggled. Draco grinned. Then he reached out and brushed her cheek. 'If I am, it's yours. This is all your fault. Your fault,' he went on, still grinning, "for being so sexy and sweet."

Hermione giggled again as he pushed her back against the chaise, leaning on top of her. "For being everything I could ever ask for." He ran his nose along hers and his hand up her side.

"Draco, I... I don't think I can again." It was going to take her a while to recoup from tonight.

"I know," he smirked knowingly. "Plus, I'm pretty, uh, empty."

"I'm keenly aware." She raised her eyebrows and Draco laughed. *He laughed.*

"Yeah, I'm sure you are." He kissed her. "So, does this mean I get to do that again?"

"What?"

"Since you're taking that potion and all... I can..." he trailed his fingers over her and tapped her lower stomach, raising his eyebrows in question.

"It's more so for accidents, not... daily use."

"Daily?" Draco exclaimed. "You dirty girl..." He grinned and she shoved his shoulder a little.

Draco grabbed her wrist and Hermione gasped. It was still very tender. He lifted it and brought it to his lips, kissing it softly.

"We can stay here tonight, if you want."

Wow. It wasn't that long ago that he had shouted at her after they accidentally fell asleep and now... He really *was* trying. Even with the prospect of more sex off the table, he was still asking her to stay.

"I shouldn't," she said disappointed. "Lavender told Ron about the last time I was out all night and he—"

"He what?" Draco's voice dripped with venom.

Hermione paused. "He asked me about it, that's all."

"That better fucking be all," he grumbled.

"I'd just rather avoid awkward questions about where I've been and who I've been with."

“Tell him.”

“*What?*” That was the one thing they ever mutually agreed on— making sure *no one* found out.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Tell. Him.”

“Are you out of your mind?!”

“That prick is trying to fuck my girl.”

“Well *your girl* isn’t fucking anyone but you so you don’t need to worry about that,” she snapped.

Draco’s face split into a wide grin. He pulled her a little closer to him. “I like hearing that.”

“You know I’d never do anything like that.” Hadn’t she proved that already?

“No,” Draco’s voice softened. “You saying you’re my girl.”

Hermione bit her lip to stop her smile. “Well... I am.”

Draco sighed happily and pushed a few curls back from her face. Then he leaned down and softly pressed his lips against hers.

“Hermione?”

She spun around quickly and Harry’s disembodied head appeared in the dark corridor.

“What are you doing up here?”

She had finally pulled herself from Draco’s arms and checked the hallway before slipping out into it, but of course she hadn’t seen Harry lurking a little ways down under his invisibility cloak.

Her heart was pounding in her chest. “I... was looking for you.”

Harry pulled the cloak from himself and the rest of his body appeared. “Why?” he asked, clearly confused.

Why? Okay, good question. It deserved a good answer.

Oh no.

“Uhm,” Hermione fidgeted, trying to think of something, anything, that sounded plausible. “I wanted to talk to you about Draco. Malfoy!”

“Did you see him up here?” He took a quick step towards her.

“No!” she squeaked. “I mean no. I was in the Room of Requirement. I was... trying to find out what he was doing in there.”

“And?” Harry said, excited.

“Nothing. That’s what I came to tell you.”

He pushed his glasses up his nose a little. "Oh. Wait... what?"

"Uhh," Hermione bounced on her feet. Draco would be leaving soon and she didn't fancy having to avoid a confrontation between him and Harry.

"I tried to get in the room, but it was occupied. How did you get in?"

"Oh," she cringed. "That was me. I was in there."

"All night? What were you doing in there?"

Fiddlesticks. What was something he would believe?

"Reading."

"Reading?"

"I found a book."

"You were reading a book," he repeated as if he didn't fully understand the concept. Or didn't believe her.

Draco's blond head ducked around the door and stopped quickly as he saw them. Hermione widened her eyes and barely shook her head, curls trembling around her face.

"What? What is it?" Harry started to turn but Hermione grabbed his arm.

"We should head back to the common room," she said loudly. Harry looked at her like she had grown a second head. Hermione glanced over his shoulder and saw Draco frowning. "It's late and Godric, am I tired. All that *reading*." She enunciated the last word and saw Draco smirk as he silently closed the door behind him.

"Uh, yeah. I guess you're right," Harry said, nonplussed.

"Don't want to get caught *wandering around*," she said firmly, pushing Harry in front of her and waving her hand back at Draco to motion for him to go.

"You're a Prefect."

"And I can't abuse that power, Harry!" she chided, glancing back at Draco again to see him silently laughing at her awful attempt to distract Harry from him. *Why wouldn't he just go already?!*

"Yeah, it's not like confounding someone at tryouts or anything," Harry joked and Hermione looked at Draco one last time to see his brows pull together slightly in question.

Hermione gave Harry an extra hard shove.

"Ow! Okay, fine! Godric, Hermione, you're as bad as McGonagall these days."

Well if he wanted to give her a night she wouldn't soon forget, that was it. Hermione was still feeling the after effects a couple days later and made sure to pick out the comfiest chair she could in the common room. This of course was the one by the fire where her two best friends were also sitting on the adjacent couch.

The subject of the evening was Quidditch and Hermione fell into her old, comfortable role of mildly reading while they discussed maneuvers and tactics that could be incorporated in the upcoming match against Ravenclaw.

Ron was growing increasingly agitated during the conversation and Harry gracefully turned it from their team to the professional ones, making Ron cheer up as he talked animatedly about the Canons. He always used his hands a lot when he was excited and Hermione found herself glancing up from her book to watch him mime players soaring past each other.

Harry caught her eye and smiled. It was good to see him happy. The lessons he was having with Dumbledore were important, but he often came back sullen and brooding. Although, he did seem in remarkably better spirits now that Ginny and Dean were no longer together. He hadn't said anything to her in so many words, but his feelings were pretty obvious. Harry had never been good at closing off his emotions, which was one of the reasons he had never been able to properly perform Occlumency.

Hermione stared at the fire, spitting and sparking. He had described his sessions with Snape when she had prompted him last year, telling her it was like someone pushing themselves inside his head, rifling through his thoughts and making images appear. Just like...

Draco... no... he wouldn't...

Would he? *Could he?*

He had threatened her with it before. Her chest tightened and she couldn't breathe for a moment as the truth hit her.

But... why? Why would he do that?

"I'm going to try and talk to Katie," Harry said as he stood up. "See if she can tell me anymore about that day in Hogsmeade."

"Harry, she's already answered everyone's questions. I'm sure she's tired of talking about it."

"Yeah, I agree."

Hermione turned sharply towards Ron. He almost never took her side, normally agreeing with Harry over her. He threw her an encouraging smile. This was... different. Supportive. Nice.

"Well I also need to talk to her about the team, make sure she's feeling up to coming back to practices."

Hermione sighed and rolled her eyes as Harry walked across the common room to the group of seventh year girls Katie was sitting with.

"Thanks for backing me up."

"Of course." Ron smiled at her again, blue eyes bright.

“You’re going to do great in the match. You’ve gotten much better this year and you were already good before. You just have to believe in yourself. I do.”

His freckled face flushed with color and he glanced down, smiling wide. “Yeah, well... it helps knowing you’re watching.”

His blue eyes met hers again and she felt a slight shiver of awkwardness. But then again, she had told him she just wanted to be friends and he had respected that. He hadn’t tried anything else with her and for the most part, treated her the same way as he had before. Well... maybe a little nicer, but she wasn’t complaining about that.

“What else am I going to do rather than watch my best friends win the house cup?” She tried to sound cheerful.

Ron’s face tightened. “Matches are a good time to sneak off if you need to. Harry said Malfoy hasn’t been at any all year and Godric knows what he’s up to these days.”

Her heart gave an extra thump.

“You’re still seeing him?”

“What?” Hermione whispered, barely able to breathe.

“Your... someone,” Ron clarified. ‘I know you said it’s not my business and I’m not trying to pry,’ he held up his hands in surrender. “But I just thought... maybe after the match, if you wanted, we could... walk down to the Lake or... something.”

She closed her book in her lap and placed a shaky hand on top of it.

“Ron—”

“Why won’t you tell me who he is?” Ron rounded on her.

She was temporarily thrown off by his change in demeanor.

“Do you think I’ll make fun of you? Because with Krum it was different. First of all we were kids, secondly, I mean, come on,” he broke another smile. “It was *Krum*.”

“Ronald!”

He moved to the edge of his seat. “The only thing I can think of is you don’t want me to know who it is because... I know him.”

Hermione bit her lip.

“I’ve racked my brain and for the life of me I can’t figure out who. I even asked Lavender if—”

“You’re talking to Lavender again?” she snapped.

“Not like that,” Ron placed his hand on her knee. “I just asked her if you had mentioned anything to her or Parvati and she said some crazy shit, but—”

“What? What did she say about me?” Something roared up in her and begged to be let out to go *scratch* Lavender’s eyes out.

“She said you...” Ron looked uncomfortable. “But... no. You’d never.”

Oh God. Oh God oh God oh God.

“But if you’d just tell me who it is, I could stop freaking out about this.”

Oh *dear God!*

“I told you before—”

“Erm, Hermione? Can I talk to you?” Ginny appeared at her shoulder and sounded nervous. She was uncharacteristically dancing on her toes and twirling a lock of her long copper hair.

Hermione closed her book and jumped up from her seat, displacing Ron’s hand. “Yeah, sure.” She didn’t waste any time following Ginny.

As soon as they were past the couch, Ginny took Hermione’s hand and led her quickly into a far corner. Hermione glanced back and saw Ron looking confused and worried.

“I’m going to tell you something very strange and then I want you to explain it to me.”

Hermione’s stomach flipped over half a dozen times. What did Ginny know? Could she have heard something? Seen something? Did Harry mention anything to her? A million scenarios rushed through her head, but all she could do in response was nod.

“Blaise Zabini just stopped me in the hall. He was asking for you.” Ginny’s light brown eyes stayed locked on hers. ‘Hermione,’ she asked calmly. “Why is Blaise Zabini looking for you?”

The rightful answer was she didn’t know, but Hermione was clever enough to make an educated guess. Draco. It had to be because of Draco.

She knew she had to answer and soon. Ginny’s placidity would not last; she was a Weasley too after all. Hermione swallowed and opened her mouth. No words came out.

“Is—” Ginny pursed her lips. “Is he the one you’ve been...?” She raised her eyebrows.

Hermione’s eyes went wide. “No. No!” She shook her head violently, big curls falling over her shoulders. “There’s nothing going on with Zabini and I.”

Ginny sighed in relief. “Thank Godric. I was worried there for a moment.”

Hermione tasted something sour. If she only knew...

“I knew it was crazy, but... he was just so insistent. I told him you wouldn’t care what he had to say and he just kept saying you would if he could just talk to you. Any idea what he’s on about?”

Hermione bit her lip. It must have been bad for Zabini to come and try and find her. Very bad. Had Draco done something? Why had he sent his friend instead of looking for her himself? Was something wrong with him?

“Probably something for Potions.” Her mouth was dry and her palms damp.

“Is Slughorn planning on killing him?” she laughed. “Because the way he made it seem, it’s a life or death situation.”

A sick, cold feeling spread through Hermione. "Where was he?"

"On the fifth floor. I ran into him on my way up. You're not seriously going to help him, are you?"

She had to. She couldn't sit in here when Draco was out there doing... whatever he was doing that was bad enough that Zabini came looking for her. Did it have anything to do with what he was doing in the Room of Requirement? No... he was on the fifth floor, not seventh.

There was still so much they needed to talk about from the other night, but he had seemed fine the past few days. A little tired, maybe and... grouchy, but that was normal for Draco.

"Help who?"

Ron appeared beside them and dread filled Hermione. How was she going to get out of here now?

"Just helping someone out with some Potions homework." She shrugged, trying to play it off and hoped that Ron didn't notice the desperation seeping from her. Draco had spied into her mind, she should be furious with him and... maybe she was, but she also couldn't ignore it if he sent someone to fetch her.

"Ernie?"

"No, Zabini," Ginny answered for her.

The blue of Ron's eyes shone wildly and she could see the outrage rising up in him.

"Ron, it's not—"

"Zabini?!"

"Ron—"

"You bloody well tell me right now it's not Zabini or I'm going to—"

"Lower your voice!" Hermione hissed at him. Ron glared at her, jaw clenched. 'And no, for your information, there is *nothing*,' she glanced between Ron and Ginny, driving the point home. "Going on between me and Zabini. At all. End of story. So you can calm down, Ronald, because if you snap at me one more time *that's it!*"

He looked a little taken aback by her harshness, but was still too worked up to back down completely.

He glanced over at his sister. "Ginny, can you give us a moment?" She looked at Hermione then nodded, backing away from them with a few looks over her shoulder. Ron, thankfully, waited until she was out of earshot before rounding on Hermione again. "You're not going out there at this time of night to meet a damn Slytherin."

"You can't tell me what to do." Hermione crossed her arms.

Ron glared at her again. "I can't. Just like you can't stop me from coming with you if you do."

Good Godric, would she ever be able to get out of here?!

"I don't need you to take care of me!" Hermione snapped, letting her frustration come through her voice.

"You need to get your head on straight. Why would you want to help a Slytherin anyways?"

"Ronald, if you don't stop questioning every one of my decisions then I'll cut you out of them entirely!" Hermione whispered fiercely at him and she felt a wave of heated irritation come off him. "Now get out of my way and *stay there*."

Hermione pushed past him and was out of the portrait hole before he could stop her. She made her way quickly to the fifth floor and looked around nervously, biting her lip and fiddling with her wand, trying to catch a glimpse of Zabini.

It was taking longer than she anticipated and Hermione was worried that she had missed him. Maybe he had left already. Should she try and check the dungeons or keep looking here? Was it too late? Was Draco okay? Her blood pumped into her head, carrying too many questions in and not enough answers out.

"Granger!" Zabini appeared around a door and Hermione jumped.

Blaise Zabini's dark eyes were watching her carefully and it was clear that he was uncomfortable with his current predicament.

Hermione did not have the luxury of feeling awkward and rushed towards the slightly open door. "What's going on?"

He eyed her again. "Why don't you tell me?" She had gotten used to Malfoy's arrogant attitude, but she didn't appreciate it from Zabini right now.

She glared at him. "I didn't come all the way down here to answer *your* questions. Now where is he?"

Zabini's lips twisted into a knowing smirk. "So it is you."

"What's me?" she snapped, her annoyance growing by the second.

"His... girl." Zabini smirked at her and opened the door the rest of the way. The classroom was a mess. Broken chairs lay across the room, scorch marks from turned over torches marked the floor, and overturned tables created a maze to a pale slumped figure at the far corner, holding a bottle.

Hermione's mouth opened as she stared up at him. She could try and deny it, say she had no idea what he was talking about, but she knew her expression had already betrayed her and she couldn't just walk away from Draco when he was like this. Her heart wouldn't let her.

"He got drunk tonight. Obviously." He led her further into the room, stepping on broken glass and scattered papers. 'And very violent. I tried to stop him, calm him down or something, but,' he stopped and glanced down at her. "He wasn't making sense. He kept saying your name, like, sounding it out."

Hermione glanced up at Blaise.

“Her-mio-ne,” he quoted and her heart jumped into her throat. She turned back to the slumped figure on the far side of the room. He said her name. He got drunk to do it, but... he said her name.

She couldn't stop staring at him. On closer inspection she saw the bottle was almost empty and his hands were bloody. Something had happened that pushed him far enough to drink again. Her heart went out to him. She knew he was hurting, but he had been doing better, hadn't he? Hadn't things changed? Of course they had. So why had he turned back to fire whisky instead of her?

“I'll... I'll handle this.” Her voice was soft, barely above a whisper. Draco dropped his head down to his chest. He was so drunk he didn't even realize she was here.

“Are you sure?” Zabini asked with raised eyebrows. “He's not easy to deal with when he's like this.”

“I can deal with him. I've done it before.”

“I can't believe it's you. I mean, I can, because,” Zabini waved his hand in front of her. “But... Merlin, Granger, I thought he *hated* you. The way he went on about his girl... and you're so...”

“What? A know it all?” Hermione snarled, but inwardly beamed. He told his friends about her? “Yeah. I am. Which means I probably know more curses than you and all your little friends put together. So breathe a word of this to anyone, and I'll use them all on you.”

Zabini looked taken aback for a moment. “Well,” he blew out a low breath. “I can see the compatibility between the two of you now.”

Hermione let her Gryffindor courage surge up in her and gave him a nasty sneer before she stalked past him, picking her way through the wreckage of the room until she got to Draco.

She knelt down at his side and reached out a hand before thinking better of it than to touch him just yet. She looked back and saw Zabini closing the door behind him as he left.

“Granger-er?” His voice was raspy and he slurred her name heavily, adding in a few extra syllables.

“Yeah, I'm here,” she said softly. His lids hung heavily over bloodshot eyes and she could smell the alcohol all over him. His shirt was partly unbuttoned and had stains from where he had spilled the whisky on himself. There was dust on his black trousers and his hair was an absolute mess, sticking in wrong directions.

“What... What are you...” he breathed heavily.

“Are you okay?” she asked, making sure to keep her voice clear of judgment. There wasn't any point to it at the moment, he was too far gone for any of her reprimanding to stick. “Why are you drinking?”

Draco didn't answer. Her question seemed to remind him that he had a bottle and he brought it back up to mouth. Hermione reached out, placing her hand over his on it and pushed it back down. She could feel the broken skin of his knuckles and the warmth of the wounds there. “I don't think you need to drink anymore.”

Draco jerked his hand away from her and with great effort lifted his face to hers. "What do I need then, huh? You?" His other hand landed heavily on her shoulder, pulling her closer to him. "Need... you."

"Draco—"

"You..." His words came slow and heavy. "You're going to hate me."

"I'm not happy with you, but I don't hate you." She tried to push his hand off of her shoulder but he latched it onto the back of her neck.

Drunk Malfoy was dangerous. He said things, did things that he wouldn't normally do sober and that was saying a lot. He had destroyed this room. The last thing she wanted to talk about right now was their situation, especially after what they had almost said the other night. She didn't want to have that conversation with him right now and she didn't really want to hear what his liquored up brain thought about it either.

"You love me?" Draco leaned closer to her and she choked on the smell of whisky on his breath. Hermione tensed at the question. His hand was heavy on her, holding her in place. "Love me." It wasn't a question this time, but an order.

"Stop."

"No."

Draco pushed her back, landing on her heavily.

"Stop it!" Hermione pushed against him and shoved him to the side, wiggling out from under him.

Draco rolled over and took a swallow from the bottle. "Can never..." he was breathing heavily and wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "Trust me. You can never love... someone like me."

"I think you have that the wrong way around." Hermione was annoyed. With him and with herself. She had told him she wouldn't come around him if he was drunk and here she was, trying to take care of him when he was worse off than she'd ever seen him.

"Yeah..." Draco murmured and tried to push himself up into a sitting position. After a few attempts that had him falling back down on the floor he sighed. "I'm on the wrong side."

He took another drink, the fire whisky sloshing around in the bottle as he turned it up.

"Give me the bottle, Draco."

"No." Draco pulled it away from her as she reached for it. His unfocused eyes gleamed. "What will you give me for it?"

Hermione straightened her skirt out over her legs and curled them under her. "What do you want?"

"Show me your tits." His grin was slow and sloppy.

She crossed her arms over her chest. "No."

"Pussy?"

“No.”

“Then leave.” He drank again.

She had half a mind to do just that. Let him sit here and drink himself sick, but... she rubbed her forehead. She couldn't leave him like this and she had sent Zabini away already.

“I'm not going to leave you.”

He had been so sluggish so far she was surprised by how quickly he struck. His cupped her cheek, brushing his fingers over it so softly it made her gasp. “So sweet. So good to me. My good girl...”

“Yes,” she took in an uneasy breath. “So be good for me, and let's get you back to your common room.”

“Don't want to go there.” He shook his head.

“Well you can't stay here. If anyone finds you here, you'll have detention for the rest of the year.”

“Stay with me.” His hand fell down her arm to grab hers. She looked down briefly and saw the blood smeared over his pale skin.

“You can't stay here,” she repeated. He wasn't even listening to her.

He pulled his hand away from her and lifted the bottle again. “It doesn't matter.”

“What doesn't matter?” Hermione pressed him. “Why did you drink tonight?”

Draco's rain grey eyes were unfocused as he pulled himself a little closer to her. He grabbed her thigh and tried to push her skirt up.

“Draco, stop—”

“Let me touch it.” His voice was ragged and he pushed her skirt up farther as she tried to pull his hand off of her, the blood on his hands still warm.

“No. Let go of me.”

His eyes met hers and she glimpsed a moment of clarity in them. “That would be better. For me to just... just let go. Let you go...” He was slurring his speech heavily and it took a moment for Hermione to figure out exactly what he was trying to say.

“Just my leg.”

“My leg.” He repeated and ran his hand back down her thigh. “Mine.”

It stopped at her knee and he took a deep breath. “Why are you drinking, Draco?” she asked again. If she was going to have to take care of him, he was at least going to answer that question.

“Can't let go,” he mumbled, but did not lift his hand from her knee.

“It's fine there,” she conceded. He looked back up at her, his expression taunt and strained, as if he was trying to say something he shouldn't, or, trying not to.

“I want you.”

“I told you, I won’t tolerate you when you’re like this.”

“Please.”

The one word sent a shard of shock straight into her heart.

Pain shone in his silver eyes and she felt it’s heavy weight pulling on her heartstrings. Yes, he was drunk and honestly she didn’t want anything to do with him when he was in this condition, but... she did want him. Want him to be okay. Want him to not be alone.

“Give me the bottle.”

He looked down at the bottle in his hand for a long moment, considering it, then handed it over to her. Hermione accepted it, shocked at how easy it was for him to give it up. She placed it as far away as she could, leaning over to make sure it was out of his reach when she felt his hands land on her body and pull her back.

He was on top of her, his whisky breath fanning out over her face and his weight bearing down on her.

“Draco—”

“Shh,” he said softly. ‘Don’t... speak.’ He was slurring again. “Don’t say anything. Don’t stop me.”

Something tightened in her chest. She should make him get off of her. She should end this. He wasn’t in his right mind and he was unstable when he drank. Dangerous. Desperate.

“I need this. I need,” he pulled at her skirt. “You.”

He tasted like fire whisky and she fought against the urge to turn her head to escape from his kiss as he slipped his tongue into her mouth, flooding it with the sickly sweet taste. She didn’t want him like this and she was still sore from the other day. She wanted *her* Draco, not this drunken mess.

He ran his hands down to her waist and fumbled with his trousers. It was wrong. More wrong than the night in the bathroom. He had invaded her mind the last time they had... and now he was trying to invade her again. Why wasn’t she stopping him?

“Make you come,” he breathed out, words heavy with whisky. “Come... with me.”

He grabbed one of her breasts, squeezing it hard until she gasped.

“Come with me,” his breath was heavy in her ear. His lips brushed against hers. “Be together.”

He ground his hips into her, pushing his knee in between her legs to part them.

“Draco... I don’t want—”

“Please,” he breathed out. “Don’t stop me.”

Hermione winced as his weight fell on her. Draco got her legs open and quickly placed himself in between them.

His mouth found hers, kissing her hungrily, but his lips were sloppy and slid over her with none of their normal control.

Hermione pushed her hands into his shoulders, trying to lift him up but he was too heavy. She turned her head, trying to pull away from him. He dragged his mouth over her cheek, running his tongue around her ear.

“Stop...”

“I can’t. I’ve tried. This... only way.” He was slurring his words again.

“Draco—”

“I’ll make it quick, Sweetheart,” his hand moved down her body. ‘Painless.’ No... she didn’t want— “For him.”

Him?

She tried to make sense of what he was saying, but couldn’t. Him? Who was him? She thought he was talking about sex, but... Oh no... he was going to hurt someone. Who? Is that why he was drinking? Did he not want to hurt them?

“Draco, don’t,” Hermione said softly. She pushed against his shoulders again and this time felt him relent.

He gave a frustrated groan and pulled himself off of her. “Can’t fucking do it.”

Hermione gathered herself up, pulling her legs up around her and glanced over to Draco who had hung his head in his hands, gripping his pale blond hair and pulling it.

“It’s... okay,” she said softly.

“Can’t...” he was breathing heavily again, as if he couldn’t catch his breath and leaned his back against the wall again. “Can’t love you...” Hermione’s eyes went wide. “And lie to you.”

Love? Lie? What was he lying to her about? The Legimency? The Room of Requirement?

He looked over at her, silver eyes big and full like the moon, whites tinged with red. “I didn’t mean to... got carried away.”

“You stopped.” Hermione reached her hand out to his.

Draco recoiled. “No. I didn’t.”

He wasn’t making any sense and he wasn’t explaining himself at all, but she had the distinct impression he wasn’t talking about her. Who was he going to hurt? What had he gotten carried away with? What couldn’t he do?

Draco reached for the bottle again and snagged it before she could stop him. He turned it up and began downing the rest of it as quickly as he could.

“Stop!” Hermione cried and threw herself on him, trying to wrestle it from him. He sucked down a few mouthfuls before she was able to tear it away from him. Hermione tumbled back, spilling the few ounces that Draco was not able to poison himself with over her chest.

She tossed the bottle to the side. It didn't break, but it clattered loudly before it rolled to a stop. She pulled herself away from him and sat back up, just in time to see Draco vomit all over himself.

The smell hit her, sour bile and sweet whisky invaded her nostrils. She covered her face, trying to keep it out, but couldn't stop it. Draco groaned and his hands fell to the floor, smacking loudly on the stones there. His head rolled over his shoulder and fell to his chest, a thin dribble of saliva dripping from his lips down to his shirt, stained with the alcohol and vomit.

She reached for him, pushing him back up as he began to tilt over, eyes closing. "Draco," Hermione pushed him back against the wall he had been leaning against. "Draco, you have to wake up." He slumped against her hands, his shirt wet under her palms.

Hermione steeled herself and lifted his face up, giving his head a small shake as she repeated for him to wake up. Draco's eyes fluttered a little and he groaned again, but it appeared that the whisky had taken hold of him and wasn't letting go.

"We have to get you cleaned up," she ordered, using the same tone she did when she told Ron and Harry to finish their homework before heading off the Quidditch practice. "We can't stay here. Draco— Get up!"

He groaned and lifted his hands only to have them fall again. She recognized the movement as him trying to push himself up, but his body wasn't working with him anymore. She took a large breath and pushed him upright again.

"I'm going to charm you, okay?" she said slowly. "I'm going to levitate you."

Draco made a weak noise of protest, but she ignored it. Wiping her hands on her ruined shirt, Hermione pulled out her wand and with a swish and a flick, Draco's limp form lifted into the air. She gently guided it over the broken chairs, upturned table legs, and scattered debris he had left on the floor. Opening the door, she checked the corridor and blessedly, it was empty.

She moved quickly towards the prefect's bath, the closest place she could think of to get him cleaned up. Maybe a cold bath would sober him up enough that he could get back to the Slytherin dormitory tonight and if not... well, she'd worry about how Ron would take her staying out all night again later, right now she was focused on Draco.

A very drunk Draco.

Anger burned in her and she did her best to ignore it. He had promised that he would stop drinking. She had told him that she wouldn't have anything to do with him when he was drunk, yet here she was, sneaking him through the corridor to wash vomit off of him. It was at that moment that she realized her anger was directed equally at herself as it was him.

The prefect's bathroom was large with a locker room and several different rooms with various types of tubs in them. Hermione selected the one with a shallow pool, thinking it would be quickest to submerge him instead of trying to clean it all off. She tapped the faucets and checked the temperature of the water as Draco lay on the floor next to her. She wanted it to be cool, but not cold.

When she deemed it a good level Hermione kicked off her shoes and knelt next to Draco.

“Draco, can you hear me?”

“Hmm.”

“I’m going to put you in the bath now, okay?”

“Where...” he mumbled. “Where are we?” His eyes opened slightly then they fell back closed.

“The prefect’s bath,” Hermione explained.

“No...” he groaned and pulled his arms around himself.

“Yes,” she said in the same tone as before. “You got sick on yourself and now I have to clean you up.”

“Not... here,” he forced out, as if it took great effort to speak.

“Where else do you expect me to get all this off you? Now, come on—”

“No... You...” He tightened his arm around himself. “Can’t...”

“I can and I will, Draco,” she said, exasperated. She was done with his drunken babble. They were going to have a very serious conversation in the morning; she didn’t care how hung over he was going to be. “Now, come on.”

Hermione pulled him to the edge and lowered him into the water. Draco moaned as the cool water lapped over him and Hermione sat down, fully clothed in the water with him. She could dry her clothes after and thought it might be best to keep a couple extra layers between them. The low temperature made goosebumps rise up on her skin above the water and she dipped more of herself under, where it was strangely warmer.

Draco began to stir a little and she leaned him back against the side of the bath, splashing some water onto his face and cleaning it off. She rubbed his hands and watched little trails of red spiral away into the bath water. His head rested on the edge of the pool, cheek pressed into the hard floor and soft breaths passed in and out of his open mouth.

This is exactly what she didn’t want to happen; for Draco to think it was okay for him to act like this and she would just put up with it. But he had been clearly upset over something and too drunk to talk about it by the time she had shown up so taking care of him was the only way she could— could what, exactly? Show him she cared? He wouldn’t remember this in the morning.

Hermione’s hand fell from his chest where she was trying to clean off his shirt. She went over the things he had mumbled and let slip. It didn’t add up... she couldn’t figure out what he was talking about. What hadn’t he stopped? What was he lying about? She glanced down at his sleeping face and brushed a few strands of his white blond hair back. What was he hiding in there?

He smacked his lips and she couldn’t help but smile a little, then catching herself, stopped. Yes, she had feelings for him, but no, that did not mean she had to like him right now. But... she did. The warmth in her chest grew as she brushed her fingers against his cool cheek.

The truth was colder than the bath water as it settled over her. He was aggravating, he was awful, he was... someone important in her life and she wanted him to be a part of it. Whatever he was going through, she wanted to go through it with him. That's why she was here. Because just like her, these feelings weren't going anywhere.

They would still have a conversation about this in the morning, but tonight she wanted to get him cleaned up and taken care of. Sighing, Hermione began to unbutton his shirt.

Draco made another small noise as she started to pull it off his shoulders. He tried to lift his head, but couldn't. His mouth hung open and his eyes remained closed. At least she'd get to see his chest and body for her trouble tonight.

"It's okay, Draco, I just need to get this off of—"

The water turned to ice. Everything turned to ice. Hermione's heart froze and stopped beating.

She had pulled his shirt off of his arm. She had never seen his whole arm before. The skin was deathly pale and long blue veins ran up it, bulging out a little over his bicep. But that wasn't what she was staring at.

What Hermione could not tear her eyes away from, was the branded open-mouthed skull with a snake slithering down the pale flesh of his left forearm.

22. twenty two

Chapter 22

A deep, aching thunder pounded into the recesses of Draco's head. He tried to groan, but his mouth and throat were so dry he wasn't able to summon it. He rolled over, trying to get some relief, but the ground was hard. He wasn't in a bed, that was for sure. Shit, where was he?

He opened his eyes, trying to focus on the world around him, but quickly closed them against the brightness. Daylight was streaming in windows in different colors and filling whatever room he was in. He groaned and pushed himself up successfully this time. His palms pressed into the floor and it was... wet. He opened one eye and saw tiles. Water. A bathroom? Was he in a bathroom?

Slowly he was able to lift himself up and look around through squinted eyes. The prefect's bathroom... Fuck how did he get in here? Last night... he didn't remember much of last night. Flashes and phrases began to come back to him as he struggled to sit up.

Throwing chairs... Blaise shouting at him... *"What the fuck are you doing? Get it together, Draco!"*

More pounding. He leaned against the wall.

"Why are you drinking?"

Granger. Granger had been there. Oh... shit.

He could remember her beside him. She kept talking, asking questions. She was always asking questions. The only time he could ever get her to shut up was when...

"Draco, stop—"

"Let me touch it."

"No. Let go of me."

Oh God...

He felt sick. What had he done last night? What had he done to Granger? He couldn't remember much else. He remembered being on top of her and hearing her whimper under him, not her normal pleading whimper, but a pained one. A terrible coldness sunk down into his bones. He had done terrible things before, but he never thought he would—

"I'm not going to leave you."

"It's... okay."

Thank fuck... the memories were hazy, but she was there, annoyed but okay. He hadn't... *thank fuck*. He didn't want to hurt her. But she wasn't here and he was alone. What *happened*?

He looked down at himself. His clothes were still damp. Someone had put him in a bath last night because the pool next to him was still full. The same someone had undone his shirt. He stared down at his chest and stomach, but it was still on, still covering his arm. He has been too drunk to do that himself, hadn't he? He swallowed something sour down and slowly slid his sleeve up.

He looked up into the daylight falling softly down on him, illuminating the Dark Mark on his white skin.

It had been covered and that part of his shirt moderately dry thankfully, but... how did he get here? On his own? Fuck... he didn't know.

He looked down at it again. Had anyone seen it? Had *she* seen it? Oh God...

Granger.

He had to find Granger.

Hermione was in a daze. Nothing really felt real the next morning as she made her way up to Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry and Ron walked on either side of her, talking about... something. She didn't even know. She hadn't been paying attention. Her eyes felt dry and somewhere in her head something told her to blink, but she just kept staring ahead, unseeing.

Her stomach clenched as she glanced over to Draco's empty desk. She hadn't expected to see him this morning, but his absence almost made this seem too real. If he had been sitting in that chair, an arrogant and bored expression on his face, she could almost pretend that last night was a bad dream, but no matter how long she stared at the chair it stayed empty.

Somewhere, miles away, Snape was lecturing. Her hands stayed in her lap, open. Ron nudged her a few times when Snape walked slowly past their desk, but when she told her arms to reach in her bag and take out parchment, they just tingled a little and stayed where they were.

The rest of the day passed in much of the same fashion. Harry asked her if she was okay at lunch and she nodded. For one terrifying second she thought about checking the Prefect's bathroom and seeing if he was still there, but when her chest seized up and her throat closed, Hermione decided that wherever Draco was right now was the last place she wanted to be.

She broke off from Harry and Ron to head up the stairs and to Arithmancy. She had stewed over it all day and still had no idea what she was going to do. She knew she couldn't tell Harry. If he knew then he would go off the deep end and he had to focus on his studies and on his lessons with Dumbledore. He had to keep his focus and Harry had a tendency to go overboard. He had ran off to the Department of Mysteries last year knowing there were Death Eaters there, what would he do if he knew one was in the castle?

He might hurt Draco or Draco might hurt him.

She thought about trying to go to McGonagall, but remembered when Harry had tried to explain his theory to her before. Hermione didn't have any proof other than her word and if Harry's word wasn't good enough before, she doubted hers would be now. But what if it was? What if she told McGonagall and they questioned Draco? Made him show them his arm? What would happen to him? Expelled? Arrested?

It should have been a clear-cut decision to go and notify the proper parties, but even though she *knew* what she should do, she could not make herself do it. She kept seeing the ugly, brutal mark on his arm in her mind but was having a hard time believing that Draco, the same person who made her giggle and smile and smirked at her with that handsome smug expression on his face, was a Death Eater. She had to whisper the thought, even to herself.

Somewhere, in the back of her mind, she knew that it was a possibility that one day far in the future Draco might take the mark. But he was so young... Why had... *Voldemort* wanted someone who was still in school to— *Oh dear Godric...*

The attacks. Katie and Ron. It was him. It was Draco. He had done those things. He had been willing, *trying*, to kill. She always knew he was a threat, always knew he was dangerous, but *murder*? The Draco she knew wasn't capable of killing anyone. She saw his hands, handing Katie the necklace, pouring poison into the mead... the same hands that she had— *Oh God...* She might be sick.

Then those hands were on her. The only warning she got was the faintest whiff of mint before his cool palm closed over her mouth as she opened it to scream, eyes wild. His other arm snaked around her middle, trapping one of her arms at her side while she pulled at his hand with the other.

"Stop fucking fighting me," he growled and she felt him heave her backwards. "You'll only make this worse."

Steaming cold panic poured through her and Hermione bucked against him harder, trying to wriggle her way out of his arms, but Draco held tight with no intent to let her go. He kicked open a door to a storage closet and shoved his shoulder back into it to close it behind them. It was incredibly dark in here with only a sliver of light coming in from the crack around the door.

"Are you going to scream if I let go?" Draco's mouth was pressed into her ear.

Hermione struggled some more and cursed herself for not keeping her wand in her hand today instead of in her bag. There was a Death Eater in Hogwarts, why hadn't she armed herself? Because it was *him*. And everything was different with him.

"Granger, calm the fuck down."

She was still straining against him, but not actively fighting him. She was out of breath. His hand was pressed against her nose and while she was able to breathe, she wasn't getting as much air as she'd like and her exertions had worn her down.

She hated this. Hated feeling his hands on her and his arms around her. Hated that she didn't hate it. Hated that a small part of her found comfort in his arms still. He was a Death Eater and she cared about him. More than she should have. Much, *much* more.

"Can I let go of you or do I need to hold you down?"

She wished she knew the answer to that question.

Slowly she felt Draco's grip on her loosen and quickly she decided not to scream, but to yank herself away from him. She dove straight to her bag and reached for her wand, but Draco grabbed her wrist as soon as her hand closed over it and a jet of light shot forth, breaking a large glass jar on one of the shelves.

He slammed her hand back into the wall and she felt a jolt of pain run down her arm. Draco cocked his head to the side. "Hold you down it is then."

"Get off me." Hermione pushed him back. "Don't touch me!"

"Okay, okay." Draco let go of her and took a step back, dropping his hands to his sides. The glass crunched under his feet.

She gathered herself a little and pointed her wand at him, watching him to see when he would try and strike next, but... he didn't. He just stood there.

"What do you think you're doing?" she hissed, now a little worried that the sound of the glass breaking might have alerted someone.

"We need to talk." His voice was low and serious. Storm grey eyes focused on her, studying her in that annoying way so she couldn't read his face. But there was something slithering behind his silver eyes. She stared hard at it. He looked every inch the Slytherin Prince she had known him to be for six years, cold, hard, and cruel.

"Dumbledore is the one I need to talk to."

"And what are you going to tell him?" His eyes stormed like a hurricane.

Hermione took a deep breath and opened her mouth to speak.

"You're not going to tell Dumbledore shit," he spat at her.

She raised her wand a little higher. "Yes I will. I'll—"

"If you were going to tell anyone you would have done it this morning. Or last night."

He wasn't wrong. She had known Draco Malfoy was a Death Eater for almost a day and hadn't told a soul. And as always, Draco had an uncanny ability to stay one step ahead of her.

"The only person you need to talk to is me."

"I don't want to hear—"

"We need to talk about last night." There was a hint of softness in his tone. Just enough to make Hermione hesitate and of course, he took advantage of that. "I can barely remember what happened. Just bits and pieces. The last thing I remember was—" He inhaled sharply. "Granger... I know I can get... rough, when I drink. Did I... I mean, are you alright?"

He was asking if she was okay. She had the power to destroy him and he was asking how she was doing. That was not normal Death Eater behavior.

"You didn't hurt me, if that's what you're asking."

He sighed in relief. "So you were able to stop me then?"

“No. You stopped you,” she admitted.

His brows pulled together in confusion. “Oh. Good.”

“And then you threw up all over yourself and I had to levitate you to the baths.”

Wait... did he know?! Did he know she saw the mark or was all of this about him thinking that he forced himself on her? Godric, was she going to have to tell him she saw it?! He had just manhandled her and hauled her in a closet to ‘make sure she was okay’, what would he do if he found out she knew the truth about him?!

He was staring at her intently, watching her face for the slightest movement. Oh... That’s what that darkness slithering behind his eyes was. He was making sure *she* knew. He wasn’t going to say anything, not own up to it, until he knew, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she had seen his mark. She had covered it up when she left him last night, not wanting anyone to stumble upon it.

She wasn’t sure why, but she had protected him.

He wasn’t going to admit the truth and if he could get away with it, he’d lie to her again.

It was a game of cat and mouse. Well, he might call her kitten, but in true Gryffindor fashion, she was a lion. And he was no mouse either; Draco was a venomous viper.

And a Death Eater.

Anger burned in her, licking her insides with hot flames. She wanted to *make him* tell her the truth. He owed it to her. After everything, *everything*, she had given him... She had always been honest with him, never gave him any reason to doubt her— *Oh...* That’s how she could do it.

“Draco, I was so worried about you,” she took a step towards him and lowered her wand, pocketing it.

“You were?” he asked, raising his eyebrows in disbelief.

She nodded and lightly placed her hands on his chest, hoping he would think the shaking of her hands was just from residual nerves. “You scared me,” she said in a soft voice and looked up at him, making her chocolate eyes as big as she could. Because she knew he loved that.

The grey of his eyes turned to a misty rain color and he wrapped his arms around her back. She could feel his heart beating so fast under her hand and softened her expression. She needed him to believe her right now so she nodded and took a large breath, letting her chest brush against his.

“I thought you’d be mad at me,” he said softly, testing her. Making sure it was safe.

“I’m not thrilled,” she pouted her bottom lip out and watched as his eyes darted down to it. “But I’m glad you’re okay.”

Hermione didn’t have much practice lying and even less using her sexuality as a tool, but she had been right. Draco *was* willing to believe her because she had never lied to him before. Draco *trusted* her.

"I am now," he murmured and bent his head down to kiss her.

She pulled back. She couldn't help it. The muscles in Draco's chest twitched at her withdrawal. How could she kiss him, knowing what she knew now? The same arm that bore the mark of the man who was trying to kill her best friend was wrapped around her right now. And worst of all, she didn't want him to remove it.

"Draco..."

"I'm sorry, Sweetheart," he ran his nose along hers. "I'm sorry I scared you. Let me make it up to you." He pulled at the back of her shirt until it came untucked, grazing his fingers along the skin of her lower back.

Her heart splintered. She loved this. She wanted this. Wanted him. Draco. She wanted Draco. Even as a Death Eater, she still wanted him. Hot tears pricked at the corners of her eyes, knowing what was about to happen. What she was going to do.

No. She wouldn't cry. Not for him.

Hermione closed her eyes for a bit longer than a standard blink and nodded. It was dark in the storage closet, but there was enough light so that when she opened her eyes she could see the relief, the *happiness* on his carved face. She slid her hands up and trailed her fingers over his jaw and then, his smile. Not a smirk, but a smile.

He was smiling at her. Because... he loved her. She knew it, she could feel it. Draco loved her. A Death Eater loved her. Hermione's throat began to close up, swelling with emotion.

He looked so happy, *delighted*. The grey tinge of his skin seemed to fade away, the weariness disappearing as his smile spread, and he looked more alive than he had in days. She swallowed against the lump in her throat, pushing down the awful blooming feeling that was now accompanied by heavy guilt.

Draco pulled the rest of her shirt from her skirt and ran his hands up her sides to rest on her ribcage. He kissed her. It was softer, sweeter than it normally was. As if he was thanking her. He nibbled on her lip and pressed her into his hips.

She was trying to trick him, or herself? Was she doing this to give into the part of her that still wanted him? Still cared? Or was this all just a ploy to force the truth into the light? She wasn't sure anymore. She was never sure with Draco. And that was the problem.

She had spent the day with a broken heart, unable to tell anyone or take comfort in anyone because no one could *ever* know what she had done with him. Especially now. It had been the hardest and loneliest day of her life and all she wanted to do was fall into his arms and let Draco take the hurt away like he did so well, but... she couldn't. Because he was the one who hurt her. And his arm bore a mark that meant she could never sink into them again.

Hermione made a small noise in the back of her throat and he took it for one of passion and deepened his kiss. She closed her eyes tightly. She couldn't love him. Because she couldn't trust him. She could *never* trust him. But... she had. With her body, with her mind, and with her heart. And he had selfishly taken all of them for himself knowing, *knowing*, what he was and what he was doing to her. All along.

She had stared at the mark long enough last night, why was she trying to see it again? Because she had to. She had to prove it to herself that it was real, this was real. More real than the warm blood pumping through her wounded heart. More real than the love she felt for him. She hated doing this to him, but he had lied to her, over and over.

“Take it off,” she mumbled. “Take my shirt off.” She *had* to make him believe.

Draco pulled at the top few buttons of her shirt and then pulled it over her head, grinning as he brushed back her messy curls. His silver eyes met hers and they *shone*. For her. She swallowed and started on his buttons.

Draco tensed again. Her fingers slipped, but she quickly started back, pretending that she didn’t notice his hesitation.

“Granger,” he said in a soft warning. He placed his hand over hers.

“Please,” she pressed her lips back into his. “Please, Draco. I want to feel you.”

He groaned and it sent another tremor through her, shaking her down to her bones. He had never wanted to take his shirt off before. It was so clear now. He had never wanted her to see the mark. The intimate experience in the dark she had loved so much had all just been orchestrated by him to hide his deceit.

He had told her he liked her in that darkness... she closed her eyes against the pain radiating through her so he wouldn’t see it.

It had just been another lie. Just like this.

He took his hand off of hers. He let her undo his shirt. She reminded herself that if it weren’t so dark in here he wouldn’t be risking this right now. Hermione pushed it off of his shoulders until it hung around his elbows. Just a little farther and—

Draco pushed her back into the wall like he had before. His mouth turned hungrier, almost desperate as he pushed his chest against hers. He felt solid, strong, and cool. Without thinking, Hermione grabbed his sides and ran her hands over the skin there.

He shivered and grabbed her hips and spreading his hands over her skin. She ran her hands up his back, feeling the taunt muscles there and warmth pooled below her navel. She shouldn’t be enjoying this. Not him. Not this.

His hands moved over her hips to her skirt, balling it into his fists. She had to stop getting distracted. She had to do this. She had to. But... she was going to give him one last chance.

Hermione moved her hands over his chest, fingers tracing the lines there and up to his face again until she was holding it in her hands. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

He grinned down at her in the faint light. “Still a bit of a hangover, but other than that, I’m fine.”

“You drank last night.” She frowned, trying to think of what she would normally do in this circumstance. Draco straightened up a little. “Is there something wrong? You’d tell me if there was right? You’d tell me if... if you were in trouble.”

One chance. One chance to come clean. If he told her then... then they could figure this out. Yes! Maybe they could go to Dumbledore together. Surely the Order could help him, protect him. Dumbledore trusted Snape after all... and Draco hadn't done anything. Yet.

"No, Sweetheart," he chuckled. "I'm not in any trouble. Everything is fine. Don't worry about me."

Lies. It was all lies. They slithered inside her, coiling around her heart and turning it cold.

He reached up and grabbed her breast with a wicked look in his eyes. "Take your bra off, I want to—"

Hermione jerked his sleeve down the rest of the way before he could stop her.

The closet was dark, but the mark was darker.

He froze. She could feel every muscle in his body contract against her. Oh no... Why had she done this here? In this random closet that no one knew she was in? When he had her half naked and pressed up against a wall.

Oh, God, he could do anything to her and Draco had already proven he was dangerous with his previous attacks. He... he could hurt her. He could kill her.

His eyes met hers, finally unable to hide his thoughts behind their silver shields. Horror, fear, and... shame.

Hermione shoved him away from her and Draco stumbled back, hitting a wooden crate full of something that made an angry buzzing noise. He jumped back from it and crashed into her again, bringing them both to the floor.

"Get off of me!" she screamed. "Get away from me!"

Draco's hands closed in on her again. "Granger—"

"You LIAR!" The tears had won her losing battle with them and filled her eyes, blurring with the darkness around her. He'd finally made her cry. She always knew he would. She always knew— "You're a Death Eater!"

"Shut up!" Draco shouted and she looked up to see his hand raised over her, dark mark bared on the arm poised above her.

This was it. He had done terrible things to other people, people she knew, people she cared about and now he was going to do them to her... Hermione flinched, readying for the strike.

"Granger, no!" Draco's weight left her. She opened her eyes. "I wasn't— I wouldn't—" His chest was heaving and he quickly pulled his shirt back over himself, hiding the mark away from her again. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Hermione pulled her shirt from underneath her and held over herself. "You already have."

"Granger—"

She pulled her legs up under her and shakily got to them. Only inches closer to the door than he was, she reached for the handle.

"Please! Just listen!"

“No!” Hermione shouted tearfully, grabbing her wand and bag too. She wasn’t leaving anything behind. “I gave you a chance! I... I gave you...”

Everything.

“I...” Draco’s voice wavered and failed. He pushed himself up to his knees in front of her. “Where are you going?”

“You lied to me. You’re a liar.” She shook her head, curls falling into her face. Her heart... her heart was shattering. She could barely see his face through her tears, but it was still too much.

“I— I’m sorry! I...” His voice cracked.

“Sorry I saw it. That’s all.” She said it to remind herself because the anguish brimming in Draco’s eyes was eroding her resolve.

“Granger...” He inched closer, not able to move well on his knees.

She pulled her shirt back over her shoulders. “Harry was right about you,” She said through the lump in her throat. “He knew. This whole year, but I didn’t listen.”

Draco’s eyes widened, staring up at her.

“I’m so stupid.” Tears fell down from her face and landed on Draco’s cheek. “So stupid.”

“Sweetheart—”

Her Gryffindor pride roared inside her. “Don’t ever call me that again,” she spat, voice full of emotion and opened the door, not caring that she was holding her bag up over her still open shirt. Not caring about anything but getting away from *him*.

Hermione took a few backwards steps out into the empty hall.

Draco reached for her, but fell forward onto his hands. She shook her head as he glanced up at her and her shaky legs broke into a run.

“Granger!” he called from behind her. She tripped on the broken pieces of her heart, but didn’t stop. “HERMIONE!”

Draco panted and gasped on the floor. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe.

Granger was gone.

She had seen the mark and she ran.

Dark scales slithered over him, twisting and constricting.

She’d left him. He’d lost her.

Oh God... *it hurt.*

It hurt worse than anything he had ever felt. He had thought the pain of taking the mark was bad but this... It was like a cold, burning poison, creeping slowly through his veins,

making its way into every inch of him as the reality of this settled heavily over him.

Granger was gone. She wasn't his anymore. He'd lost her. She'd ran. She left him. Here. Alone.

He was cold. Colder than he'd ever been. His hands shook violently as he looked down at them. His whole arms convulsed, barely holding him up. His chest... *fuck, his chest.*

Somehow he had crawled back into the supply closet. He was still on the floor, still gasping.

How had it come to this? He hadn't been sure she knew and at first she had been so angry at him, but then... she had been worried about him and he thought... well... if she knew the truth she would have already told someone. Once he'd figured out she hadn't gone to Dumbledore he thought he was in the clear. That she was mad about him drinking and grabbing at her, but she'd forgiven him for shit like that before, she could do it again.

Fuck, he'd known all along that if she knew the truth she'd hate him. She'd never want him. And still... he had let himself concoct a scenario where she loved him enough to follow him or at least to...

Fuck. Draco covered his twisted face in his hands. At least love him enough for him to take her. Fuck... how did he get so fucked up? How did *everything* get so fucked up?

It had been fine a day ago. Fine until he went to work on the Vanishing Cabinet and had actually repaired it. Fixed it. Completed it. All those hours, days, weeks, months had added up and he had restored the Cabinet for human use. He stepped through it and looked around the empty shop with wide eyes.

Borgin had walked out of the back room and nearly fainted when he saw him. Draco quickly turned and dived back into the Cabinet, feeling the strange sucking sensation as he shifted from one place to another. He hadn't wanted anyone to see him. Because then they'd know it was done and he'd be expected to kill a man and... he didn't want to.

He wanted to stay here. With her.

He didn't want to run. Didn't want to serve his Lord.

But he wanted his father home and well and he wanted his mother safe and happy.

And her. He wanted her. To love him. Back.

To fucking *love him back.*

It wasn't fair. It wasn't fucking fair that he the girl who was what he wanted in every single way was a fucking Mudblood.

Shit. No. She... she was...

Draco closed his eyes so tight it hurt. Good. He should hurt.

This love hurt. He hated this burning inside him, but dear God, he'd die without it. Without her.

He hadn't been able to stand it so he had taken a bottle off Theo and set about doing the only thing that he knew how to do in these situations. Fuck shit up.

He had to kill Dumbledore in order to save himself and his family. But if he killed Dumbledore Granger would hate him forever. But if he didn't, the Dark Lord would murder him and let his father rot away and probably something worse to his mother.

He wanted to tell her everything.

He never wanted her to find out about him.

She couldn't find out about the mark or the awful things he'd done. To the Muggle family. To other people. To other girls. How Pansy had told him about all the shit with her father and how he used that to get close to her, to get her to sleep with him. How he cast her aside after she said she was falling for him, only to pick her back up when he got bored. How he used her shamelessly and how she did things she didn't like to please him. How that made him like those things even more, but not her.

How he treated Blaise. Blaise, who had always been there for him and Draco never *once* said a kind word to him. Blaise who he insulted and snapped at whenever he was in a bad moon because he would take it. Blaise who would heal his hand when he threw it into a wall, who brewed him potions when he drank too much, who gave up evenings to play fucking chess just to help him kick his habit. Blaise who he wouldn't even call his *fucking friend*.

His father had told him friends made you weak and loyalties got you hurt. He pushed everyone who showed him an ounce of kindness away and goddamn it, he loved the way that felt. Loved being able to hurt them and keep them coming back.

And he had done the same to her. And fuck, he thought maybe she liked it too. Maybe she... but just because she liked him to be rough with her didn't mean she wanted to get her heart broken and that is exactly what was going to happen when he killed Dumbledore and she either found out the truth or he kidnapped her.

Because he could spin it any way he wanted, but that's what it was. He was going to *Avada* the old man and then *Imperius* her to come with him. What choice did he have?

He was a piece of shit.

Complete shit.

He bored into her mind when she was at her most vulnerable and took advantage of her. He'd violated her personal thoughts and feelings so that *he* would know if she loved him because it would make *him* feel better and tried to trick her into saying it because once she said it...

Once she said it he could justify all the horrible things he was planning on doing because of it. He could abduct her, hold her prisoner, keep her all for himself and she'd learn to be okay with it because *she'd* be in love with *him*.

That was the awful, fucked up truth of it.

That he was willing to do *anything* it took to keep her, even if it meant hurting her.

Draco had drunk almost the whole bottle and destroyed the room in a drunken rage to try and combat the sick feelings of guilt and remorse that were spawning from this god-awful *love*. He never expected her to show up. And he *never* expected her to... try and help.

She *had* to have seen it. He was a fool for thinking otherwise for even a second, but... this stupid, foolish *love* made a small bit of hope shine inside him that maybe, just maybe, she hadn't.

And today she made him think... think he had another chance. A chance to make things right with her. Be the man she thought he was, the man she wanted him to be.

But he wasn't.

He was a fucking Death Eater and she had left him for it.

Draco wandered down the halls, a few people passed him on their way to dinner, but no one spoke to him. He wasn't sure where he was going until his feet led him to Myrtle's bathroom and he walked in.

"Draco!" she smiled at him. "Oh..." her smile fell away. "What's wrong?"

His chest caved in. What was wrong? What was *wrong*?!

He was. He was so damn wrong.

Draco leaned over the sink and felt his eyes burn. She was gone. He wasn't going to get her back. She'd never let him near her again, not after today. *That* had been his last chance. She had asked him, one final time, and like the snake he was, he had lied. Again.

Because his whole life was a lie. If one Muggleborn rose above, could others? They were different, yes, because they came from a different world, but were they inherently bad because of it? She wasn't. And if she wasn't, maybe the others weren't. And if they weren't, then his father was wrong. And if his father was wrong, then the Dark Lord was wrong. And that meant *he* was wrong for having the mark branded into his skin and Granger had seen it and—

Draco's shoulders heaved and his chest tightened to the point where it hurt to breathe.

None of it mattered. If she ever loved him, she didn't now. So why not kill Dumbledore? Why not murder him like he was supposed to, like he was *raised* to, trained to, and then get the *fuck* out of here before he was caught?

Because he didn't want to. He didn't want any of it. He just wanted her. Her. Granger. Hermione.

He gripped the edges of the sink until his knuckles turned white, hanging his white blond head down. His tears hit the porcelain with small splashes.

"Don't," Myrtle hovered near him, speaking softly. "Tell me what's wrong... I can help you..."

"No one can help me," Draco heaved in a shaking breathing. In fact, his whole body was shaking, sobs racking through him. "I can't do it... I can't..."

He lifted his face up and saw a figure reflected in the mirror in front of him. He gulped down a breath and blinked the tears from his eyes.

Potter.

There was only one reason he'd be here. She fucking told him. She sent Potter after him. She betrayed him.

Draco saw black spots dance in his vision and something deep and dark rose up in him, poison dripping from its fangs as it struck out, hissing and spitting.

Potter who she loved. Potter who she had run to. Potter who had always beat him. Who was the better Seeker. Who was the star of Potions. Who was the fucking Chosen One. Who was the one *she had chosen*.

Potter who was the fucking reason he was a Death Eater in the first place.

Draco spun around, wand in his hand and aimed it at Potter's scared up fucking face.

Potter wanted to duel a Death Eater? Well he'd fucking give him one.

Draco opened his eyes and his Godfather's hooked nose was the first thing he saw.

Snape was sitting by his bed. His bed in the hospital wing. Draco sucked in a deep breath and tried to sit up a little, but immediately fell back as hot lashes of pain shot across his torso.

"You shouldn't move. The skin is new and tight. It will loosen with time, but if you try to stretch it, it can break open again."

Draco glowered at Snape. "What are you doing here?" he snarled. "Hoping to finish the job? Both of them?"

Snape's dark eyes glittered. "Hardly. And as you know, it would be impossible for *me* to... finish the job, as you so crudely put it, without condemning myself to the same fate."

Draco laid back. "If you were a better fucking teacher, Potter might have done it for you and then you could have all the glory, just like you've always wanted."

He wanted to hurt someone. Anyone. Anything. Everything. The pain in him was too much. He had to get it out.

"I do not wish to have to report to the Dark Lord of your failure or your death. All I want is to see his orders carried out."

"Then do it yourself!" Draco shouted. Snape pulled back, obviously surprised at his outburst. The pain was searing over his chest again, but Draco grit and bore it. It was nothing compared to what was under his skin. "I don't want it anymore. I don't want any of it."

Snape's brows furrowed and hung heavily over his black eyes. "Draco, what are you saying?"

Draco fell back against his pillow and closed his eyes. The lump in his throat was back and the tightness in his chest had nothing to do with his new skin.

“Do you no longer wish to serve your Lord and Master?” Snape’s voice was intriguing. Curious. As if he was almost... happy about this. Pleased with Draco’s refusal.

Draco swallowed hard, trying to dispel some of the emotions rising up in him again. No. He didn’t. But he didn’t have a choice. What was he supposed to do? Just let himself be killed and his father die? He wished someone would tell him. Help him. He felt so... lost.

“I want you to get the fuck away from me.”

Snape shifted in his seat. “That’s hardly a way to say thank you to the man who saved your life and your *skin* by hiding your mark!” he hissed through his teeth.

Draco looked down. He was wearing fresh clothes, not the torn, bloodstained ones he had been carried in with.

“Had a lot of practice with that, have you?” he sneered. “Playing pet to Dumbledore for sixteen years has bound to help you pick up some tricks.”

“You insolent little shit.” Snape stood up and Draco saw his dark wand in his hand.

Fucking do it. Curse me. Hurt me.

“At least I’m not a halfblood turncoat who’s only trusted enough to be assigned as a glorified babysitter.”

The stream of red light hit him across the face, burning into his skin like a slap. He would know, he’d received enough of them from his father over the years to become intimately familiar with the feeling.

Draco’s head snapped to the side and he laid there, breathing heavily, unable to do anything but feel the sting on his cheek, the searing on his skin, and the cold emptiness in his chest.

Granger.

“Madame Pomfrey has strict instructions not to release you until I come to collect you. Don’t bother trying to escape, the door will be locked and I have your wand. But, just for good measure,” Snape smirked cruelly and flicked his wand again. Draco’s hands snapped to his sides and he felt his entire body stiffen uncomfortably.

He couldn’t speak. He couldn’t move. It was as if he was made out of stone.

“This way you won’t hurt yourself by flailing around. I don’t want another Howler from your mother threatening to castrate me if another one of your hairs is out of place.”

Draco was fuming, blood rushing, but unable to move even a pinky to do anything about it. This was humiliating. He was going to make Snape pay for this. Right after Dumbledore and Potter.

Snape sneered down at him. “I will see you tomorrow. I expect your attitude to improve by then.” He glared down at Draco who was unable to answer, but knowing his Godfather was skilled at Legilimency, Draco conjured up an image of Snape crying out in pain and tried *shoving* it at him.

Snape glared darkly at him before reaching out and closing Draco's lids over his eyes. He heard him sweep from the hospital wing, the door thudding closed behind him, leaving Draco alone in the darkness.

Hours later he heard the door open. He was still frozen in his world of darkness and only hoped it wasn't Potter come to finish him off.

But that wasn't his style. Not the Golden Boy of Gryffindor.

Oh, how he *hated* him.

The footsteps were light. Not Potter's.

They stopped at his bed. Draco felt something run down his spine. He might not be able to see, but he could tell someone was looking at him.

His ears strained for any noise, anything at all to tell him what was going on. Then the bed squeaked. Someone had sat on the side of it.

Vanilla and cinnamon. He could smell vanilla and cinnamon.

Granger.

Granger was here.

Oh *fuck* Snape for jinxing him. She was here and he couldn't even speak to her! Couldn't open his eyes, couldn't even let her know he was awake in here!

She gave a small sniff and his anger left him as the cold pain seared in his heart again. *Granger...*

"Draco? Are you asleep?"

No. I'm very much awake, but some ASSHOLE jinxed me so you're just going to have to trust me on this one.

Trust, yeah right.

"Maybe it's better that you aren't."

He could practically picture her sitting here, picking at her hands like she did when she was nervous.

"Are you okay?" she asked in a small voice. "I hope you are. Harry didn't mean to... it was an accident. He didn't know what that spell did."

Believe me, when I get my hands on him, it won't be a fucking accident.

"He's sick over it. He never wanted to hurt you."

Draco felt uncomfortable listening to this. So... Potter wasn't trying to kill him? Then, did Granger *not* tell him?

"When he told me what happened I was terrified. I... Oh God, this is all so wrong, but I... I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you."

Oh, Sweetheart... I'm right here. Right fucking here.

She was silent for a long time. He heard a few more sniffs and something that might have been her wiping her eyes. Picturing Granger crying made him feel sick all over again.

"Why?" she whispered. "Why, Draco? Why would you do it?"

I had to. You don't understand. I didn't want to, but I had to. For my father and my mother. He'd have killed us all if I didn't and he still might if I don't follow his orders—

"I thought..." she breathed out. "I believed you. But it was all just lies, wasn't it?"

*No! Fuck, Granger, no! I... I meant it. I **mean** it. I—*

"I guess it's a good thing we never finished our conversation then. I guess it's good I never told you."

His heart was pounding in his chest so hard it hurt.

Tell me, oh for the love of Salazar, Hermione, please... tell me you love me.

"I don't know what to do. How do I stop this?"

Don't. Don't stop. Please... please don't stop. Give me a chance to explain before you—

"I should never have gotten involved with you. I knew who you were and still..." she sighed. "I'm just a silly little girl who slept with the first boy who called her pretty." Her voice was weak and shaking.

He hated hearing her like this and hated hearing about the pain he was causing her. Hate and anger he could take, but these sad snuffles and heartbroken admissions... he wished Potter *had* finished the job right now.

"God, I... I *hate* myself for this."

Either the jinx was spreading to his lungs or his body was rejecting oxygen. He couldn't breathe. He didn't want to. All he wanted to do was hear her say she didn't mean it and she still wanted to be with him and they'd make it work.

Granger, please don't. Don't hate yourself. Hate me. Love me, hate me, give it all to me. Just stay with me.

"Just do me one favor, okay?"

Anything, Sweetheart. If you give me another chance, I'll give you whatever you want.

"Don't tell anyone."

What?

"Blaise knows, but... no one else. And if you tell people, it will make this real and... I want to..." her voice was breaking. "I want to forget you."

His chest was breaking in half, caving in, crashing.

You can't forget me! Please, Granger! Fuck... no...

He felt her lips softly graze against his. They were wet and salty with tears. Her vanilla cinnamon scent swarmed over him and a single curl brushed against his face before he felt her pull back.

“I thought I loved you, Draco.”

Shit, don't do this! Please!

“But I guess that was just another lie too.”

No it's not! It's not because... because I...

“Goodbye.”

Don't leave me... Hermione, I... I love you.

Fuck! He was finally able to say the words and he wasn't able to *fucking say them*.

The bed squeaked again and he raged against the magic holding him in place, but could do nothing but listen to her light footsteps as they turned softer and finally were gone.

He lay completely still in the cold hospital bed, breaking into a million pieces and not able to pick a single one back up. He just had to stay there, and feel it all.

She should have gone to someone. Told someone the truth, but just couldn't bring herself to do it. What if they asked how she knew? What would she tell them? What *could* she tell them? That she had been sleeping with him for months now? What would they think of her then? A Death Eater's whore...

All the things he had called her, all the things he had said about her, she now felt them all. Dirty. Filthy. He had called her Mudblood and she had only stopped him because it was wrong, not because she didn't like it. And a small part of her had soared when he started calling her Sweetheart. As if he cared about her. As if he loved her.

But he didn't. He never had. He had told her that from the start, that he hated her, loathed her, what he thought of people like her. And none of that had stopped her. Maybe she was a slut, willing to do anything for the feeling. Even Lavender had waited until she had been in a relationship to give it up, but no, Hermione had let a Death Eater take her virginity. Not even *taken* it, she had asked him to.

And then begged him to do it again and again.

Hermione wiped her eyes, red and puffy and swollen from days worth of crying sessions. She pushed the door of the bathroom stall open and walked over to the sink.

She was a mess. Red nose, wet lashes, and chapped lips. A wave of her wand hid the worst of it and Hermione ran her fingers through her messy hair, hoping that everyone would be too busy to notice the glamour she had put on herself before heading outside during a free period before dinner. Most everyone was distracted with the upcoming match tomorrow so it was fairly easy to slip out of the castle and across the grounds.

Hermione sat by the Lake, chewing on her lip and staring down out at the sun-lit water. She had come out here to get away from everyone for a moment. Sometimes it was good to be around people, it kept her from sinking too far down into her thoughts, but other times it seemed too much and she longed for the quiet solitude.

The afternoon sun was warm and a gentle breeze blew over her, brushing her curls back over her shoulders.

“Hermione? What are you doing all the way out here?”

She blinked herself out of her thoughts and looked up to see Ron standing next to her.

“Oh...” she stared up at him. “I was just...” she trailed off and looked back at the Lake. “Sitting.”

“I see that,” he laughed.

Hermione tried to smile, but... it didn't work. “Did you need me for something?”

Ron sat down next to her, placing his broom on the stony shore next to him. “No, I was just... walking around. I was going to try and practice some. We've got the match tomorrow and... well, I just wanted to try and clear my head before I went back in.”

She didn't say anything. She didn't know what to say. Normally, she'd be able to think of something encouraging or comment on how all his practice was sure to pay off, but right now... all her energy was being taken up by merely trying to exist.

“What's going on, Hermione? You've barely said anything in two days. I... I know you're going to yell at me again for talking about it, but does this have anything to do with...” he raised his eyebrows a little in question.

Hermione bit her lip and picked at her hands. She nodded.

Ron let out a low breath and put his arm around her. It didn't feel like when Draco did it. Ron's arm hung low around her back, holding her shoulder in comfort. Draco had draped his around her neck, pulling her towards him like he owned her.

“It's over?” His voice was soft.

She nodded again, unable to say the words.

“I'm so sorry, Hermione.” He squeezed her shoulder. “Do you... want to talk about it?” he asked awkwardly.

She shook her head and Ron seemed a little relieved by this.

A small bird flitted in front of them, chirping happily. Hermione watched it as it flapped its little wings and flew off into the Forest. She looked into the dark trees and closed her eyes. She didn't want to think about the Forest. Or him.

It seemed everything reminded her of him these days.

“Is there anything I can do?”

She shook her head and took a breath. “No. But this is nice.”

And it was. It was nice to feel someone next to her. Nice to feel someone care for her. Nice to have a friend.

“Yeah it is, isn’t it?” He smiled down at her, blue eyes as clear and bright as the summer sky above them. ‘I’m sorry I got upset with you the other night,’ Ron admitted. “You didn’t deserve that.”

Hermione looked up at him, eyes wide as she stared into his crystal blue ones.

“I know I overstepped my bounds. I just didn’t... well... I didn’t want you to get hurt.”

Hermione’s lip trembled.

“Oh Hermione,” Ron said her name softly and brought up his other hand to cup her cheek. It was warm against her skin. Draco had always felt cool. Would she ever stop thinking about him?

Hermione felt the thin defense she had put in place start to fall. Her eyes brimmed with water and she felt the deep ache in her chest again.

Ron’s mouth opened slightly and she could see her pain reflected in his face. She whimpered and threw her arms around his neck, burying her face in his chest and felt her tears slip from her eyes and onto his shirt. Ron sucked in a breath and then she felt his other arm softly wrap around her, holding her as she sniffled and shook.

It only took a minute or two for her to regain her composure, but Ron just sat there and held her, slightly rubbing his hand over her back to calm her.

She was so glad he was here. So glad she wasn’t *alone* anymore. She had said goodbye to Draco and... no. Malfoy. He was Malfoy. Her heart contracted painfully.

Hermione pulled back and wiped her eyes, but Ron’s shirt had caught most of her tears. She looked down at the two wet spots on it.

“I— I’m sorry, I just—”

“Don’t.” Ron held her hand. “Hermione, you know that I...” he breathed out. “But that doesn’t stop me from being your friend. No matter how I feel, I will *always* be here for you.”

The bruised lump that had been her heart gave a beat. But would he? If he knew... would he hate her?

“Thank you, Ron.” It was all she could manage. Hermione slowly pulled her hand out of his and looked back over the Lake before picking up a small grey stone and turning it over in her palm.

“Do you want me to curse him for you?” he joked, trying to make her smile. “I’ll do it.”

“You don’t even know who he is,” she murmured.

Ron eyed her carefully then dropped his eyes. “Doesn’t matter. He hurt you.”

She squeezed the little grey stone in her hand and took a deep breath. “Just... just stay here with me.”

Ron watched her finger the stone.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“*Avada Kedavra!*” Draco pointed his wand at a small bird in a tree but it chipped and flitted away as the green stream of light fell short.

He was going to kill Dumbledore. He was going to do it. He was going to *make* himself do it.

She wanted Weasley? Fine.

No. Not fine.

“*Avada Kedavra!*” He missed this time as he aimed at a beetle, closer to him. The shiny black bug scurried away under a log.

Not fucking fine. She loved him. That wasn’t something she just got to throw away because she didn’t *feel* like it anymore.

He had tried to do what she asked and stay out of her way. She needed time and... he could give her that. At least a little bit of it. Lull her into a false sense of security and then... *strike*.

It could be like it was before. They could be happy. He could make her happy. He could *make her* happy. All she had to do was just fucking come back. Come back to him. He missed her. He missed her so fucking much. Like a limb. Like an organ. And he couldn’t stand the awful cracking inside him that just wouldn’t fucking stop.

Two days was long enough without her. He knew she had a free period and she normally spent it in the Library so he had walked down every single aisle looking for her. When he had exhausted his search, he followed the path she had taken him on the night he walked her back to her common room. Nothing.

Where was she? Yeah, he was giving her space, but not that fucking much. He had kept to the shadows, but he had watched her. Watched her walk from class to class, head down and shoulders slumped. It made him hurt. *Everywhere*.

After he finally came to the conclusion that she wasn’t in any of the common places of the castle and watched the corridor to the Gryffindor common room for half an hour just in case she walked out, he decided to check the grounds. He made his way down to that oaf Hagrid’s shack, knowing she sometimes visited him, but no luck.

Goddamn it, if Potter hadn’t had beat him at the beginning of the year and gotten the *felix felicitis*, he would have downed the whole vial to try and find her and get her back. He was contemplating what he was going to say when he finally found her, “*I love you, come back to me,*” when he stopped walking.

There. On the far shore of the Lake was Granger. *With Weasley*.

He didn’t like how close they were sitting. He *really* didn’t like it when he put his arm around her and he thought he was going to lose his fucking mind when she threw herself on him.

And he had to sit there, and watch *his girl*, take comfort in the arms of another man.

Because of him.

Because of what he'd done.

Well, they hadn't seen anything yet.

He wanted to curse Weasley into bloody chunks, but it was himself he was really angry with. He had her, he had her at the point where maybe, *maybe*, they could have had a future, but he had fucked it all up. It was all his fault.

She wanted to forget, but she couldn't forget him that quick. Even if she tried to distract herself with the likes of Weasley. She couldn't just turn this off because if there was a way to stop these feelings he would have done it long ago and spared himself this scorching, burning love.

"*Avada Kedavra!*" The green light twisted unnaturally and hit a small furry creature that had been unfortunate enough to stick its head out of its burrow just as Draco was passing by.

Pain, anger, rage, and hurt stormed inside him. She wanted to forget? No. He'd remind her. Remind her who he was. How he felt. How *much* she loved him.

He... he could fix this. He had fixed the Cabinet and he could fix this too. Fix her. He was cunning. He was resourceful. He was ambitious. If he couldn't get rid of this pain, this love, then she couldn't get rid of him.

He stepped over the long furry rodent, stalking along the edge of the Forest. The killing curse took initiative, intention. He had to mean it, to want it. And there was nothing more that he wanted than her. And if this was the way to do it, then he would.

Draco turned and headed back up to the castle. He wasn't there yet, but he was getting close.

23. twenty three

Chapter 23

Hermione tossed over in her bed. The blankets shifted with her, pulling tightly around her body. She tucked her face into the pillow, chestnut curls resting under the hand that she pulled in close to her face. Her brow creased a little as a small noise came from her sleeping form. She took a deep breath, eyes racing behind her closed lids.

“Ron!” she cried out and he rushed towards her. “Ron, please!” His footsteps were heavy as they pounded down the black tiled corridor.

“I’m here,” he ran into her, grabbing her hands and pulling her along with him. “I’m with you.”

Hermione clasped his hand tightly in hers and started off with him, running towards the door at the end of the hallway. They burst through into the large circular room. She knew it well. The doors started spinning and somehow she lost hold of Ron’s hand.

“Ron!” she screamed out, watching the doors speed past her. As they began to slow she tried to catch her breath, eyes darting to each one as it passed. Which one should she go through? Where was Ron? Where were the Death Eaters? Where was *her* Death Eater?

She took a step forward, unsure where to go or what to do, but she knew she couldn’t stay here. She needed to find Ron and then Harry. They needed to get out of here before they were found.

A door opened, creaking slightly as it swung towards her. It was dark inside, so dark. She couldn’t see anything. Hermione held her breath, but no one came out. She took a step back. She didn’t know what was in that dark room, but she knew doors shouldn’t open on their own.

“Oh thank Godric!” Ron’s voice sounded from behind her. Hermione spun around to see him surging through another door. “Hermione, I’ve been looking all over for you! Hurry he’s —”

“Granger...”

His deep voice echoed around in the room and in her head. Her Death Eater had found her.

Slowly she turned and saw him standing there in the dark doorway, his black robes making him almost invisible except for the cold metal mask and shining silver eyes locked onto hers.

Hermione sucked in a quick breath and held it, unable to breathe out.

“Hermione! Come on!” Ron called to her.

The silver eyes narrowed knowingly and his head tilted to the side.

He held out a hand covered in a black leather glove. "Come with me."

Her heart... oh, *her heart*. It had been broken, bruised, and beaten, but with those three words it filled to the brim with everything she had ever felt for him.

Hermione stared into his silver eyes. She knew those eyes. She knew him. *Draco*.

She had missed him *so much*. So much she wasn't sure it was possible. How could someone miss someone else like this and still be able to function?

Well, she wasn't. She was just barely getting by. If she thought Draco ending things with her before was bad, that was nothing, *nothing*, compared to how this felt. This was... Empty. Open. Awful.

But staring into his silver eyes, it all came back. The bubbles, the flutters, the beating, the blood, the *love*.

Draco...

Hermione took a step towards him and his eyes shone.

"Hermione, no!" Ron shouted.

It was wrong. It was all wrong. It had been wrong all along and she had always known that, but... Oh God, it felt so good.

She was only a few feet from him and heard the leather stretch as he flexed his fingers out towards her. Hermione lifted her hand.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" Ron shouted.

Hermione took a shaky breath, her chest trembling as it filled.

His eyes gleamed.

Her hand landed in his.

"Hermione, no!"

Draco pulled her towards him. Her body fell against his, hardened by a leather doublet under his black robes. His hand ran down her side and around her to rest on the small of her back.

"Oh Sweetheart," he breathed out through the mask.

Hermione shook all over. It was so wrong... he was a Death Eater! But she wanted him. She... loved him.

"You just can't help yourself, can you?"

Ron's shouts faded in the background as her blood rushed in her ears.

She felt tight and loose all at once. Being here, in his arms, was so familiar, but also terrifying now. She knew what was on his arm, but what *really* scared her was that there was a part of her, a part bigger than she ever wanted to admit, that didn't care. That just wanted *him*.

Mark and all.

Hermione whimpered as he pulled her into the dark room with him, door closing behind them.

He waved his wand and his mask faded away into silver smoke, leaving the smug, smirking face she knew so well in its place.

“Love me?” His smirk spread and one eyebrow raised slightly.

Hermione opened her mouth, not sure what was going to come out.

“Yes.”

“Good girl.”

Oh God...

His arms snaked around her again and then lifted her. Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling herself against him. He slammed her back into a wall. Hermione gasped as he growled, pulling her legs around him. Her body gave itself over to him, wrapping around him, letting him roam it, reign it.

He buried his face in her neck; mouth sucking, biting, kissing her skin. Hermione leaned her head back against the wall, running her fingers up into his hair. She could smell the sweet mint of him mixed with the creamy parchment as she mussed his hair, pulling it a little and pressing his head further into her.

“Oh Draco...” She closed her eyes as her body came alive again. Passion burned in her veins and her heart beat wildly as his hands grabbed at her, simultaneously holding her to him and pressing her into the wall. She had missed this feeling, his control, *him*.

“I’m here, Sweetheart,” he whispered in her ear, voice soft but words loud. “And I’m never going to let you go.”

Hermione moaned as his lips crashed onto hers. He tasted like crisp mint and Hermione opened her mouth, letting him have it, letting him take her.

Then it wasn’t just her mouth and his tongue.

It was him.

Everywhere.

Draco thrust himself inside her with a deep grunt. Hermione gasped, feeling him stretch her, fill her, claim her.

It was so much, too much. It was everything she wanted, and everything she could never have again. Except for right now, right here.

“Draco,” she gasped. “Please... yes...”

Draco groaned from deep within and quickened his pace.

“Fuck, Granger,” he said in a raspy voice. “You want it?”

“Yes,” she whimpered.

“What do you fucking want?”

“You. I want you.”

Draco groaned again and pushed himself in her so hard her entire body surged up with it. He growled, pushing her harder into the wall, stilling her so he could indulge in her further.

“You’re mine.”

“I’m yours. Oh God, Draco, I’m all yours.”

He looked deep into her eyes. “My whore?”

Hermione felt like she was about to burst. “Yes,” she gasped.

“My girl?”

“Oh God, yes!”

“Come. Come with me.”

Hermione’s body tightened and closed in around him. It was about to happen. She was going to come. With him. Her Draco. Not Malfoy. Not the Death Eater. *Draco*.

He looked deep into her eyes, “I love you, Hermione.”

Oh... *oh... Oh!*

Hermione’s eyes flew open. She was staring at the paned window beside her bed, breathing heavily.

A dream. It was only a dream.

Her body still surged with want and desire, but she was alone. No Draco. No Malfoy. No Death Eater. Just alone.

Cold crept into her chest, displacing the heat of passion there and coiling tight around her ruined heart.

She blinked her eyes and stared at the window. The moon was all but a sliver of white against the dark sky, barely anything more than a wisp of light. She closed her eyes tight for four seconds, willing the tears not to come. And with the strict self-control she had practiced for years, her body obeyed.

The burning in her eyes faded, the tightness in her throat loosened, and the lust and love that her dream Draco had awoken in her settled into cold ash inside her.

Hermione opened her eyes. Blank and empty, but at least they weren’t filled with tears this time.

The fact that Gryffindor had won the House Cup and the news that Harry was now dating Ginny swept through the school, igniting everyone’s conversations with their names along with Ron and Hermione’s thrown in every now and then.

The weekend after the match had passed quickly with Harry and Ginny trying to spend some time alone and Ron awkwardly talking out his feelings about it with Hermione. She patted the seat next to her and Crookshanks quickly jumped up into it. Hermione shrugged a little as if to say 'too bad' and Ron rolled his eyes, taking a seat on the other end of the couch.

"D'you... do you think he's always liked her?" Ron asked, still not exactly comfortable with the fact that his best friend and his little sister were somewhere on the grounds canoodling.

"Harry's always liked Ginny," Hermione answered.

"Yeah, but, you know... like *like* her?"

"Ronald, it's happening. You can't stop it."

"I'm not trying to! I just... I always figured he thought of her like a sister too!"

"Well, obviously not," Hermione chided, although she was slightly entertained by Ron's discomfort. She scratched Crookshanks under his chin and he lifted his head, closing his yellow eyes happily. "People's feelings change over time, evolve."

"Yeah..." Ron trailed off, brows hanging heavily over his eyes. "I guess so."

Would her feelings change? Would she ever not feel this deep ache in her chest? She wished she could forget the way he made her feel and the feelings he inspired in her. But she couldn't. And it made the ache quake so deep in her she felt it in her bones.

"Don't worry, Ron," Hermione said, sighing a little. "Harry is a good guy, he's going to treat her right. Between the two of them, I'm more worried about him than Ginny."

Ron smiled and laughed a little. "Yeah, you're probably right. You always are."

Hermione glanced up and gave him a small smile. Very small, but... at least she was able to give him that much.

They spent the rest of weekend in a very similar fashion, Harry and Ginny wandering back in after dinner. It was obvious they were trying to hold back for Ron's benefit, or at least Harry was. Ginny was thrilled, often leaning over and giving Harry a quick peck on the cheek just because. Hermione watched as Harry's face flushed red and then the small glance he would throw her way, green eyes brilliant.

She was happy for them, honestly she was, but it was hard to see two of her friends in such an affectionate, happy relationship when her own had never been that way even at its best.

They had always had to hide. Always had to lie. But she had just thought they were lying to other people, not each other.

She once again had considered telling Harry about Malfoy's mark, but he was *so* happy with Ginny and Harry didn't have many things like this in his life so she held her tongue.

But overall it was... nice to hang out with her friends in her common room so when Monday morning rolled around, Hermione began to get very nervous at breakfast. She kept glancing over to the Slytherin table, looking for him. Whether or not she wanted to actually

see him, Hermione hadn't completely made up her mind, but eventually on one of her sweeps down the table Hermione caught the eye of Blaise Zabini again.

His face was mostly covered by a steaming mug as he took a long drink of his coffee and Hermione's chest contracted a little at the deep look in his dark eyes. He knew. Did he know about Draco's mark too? Draco liked to brag, but... he was also fairly secretive when it came to his personal life. Or at least he was with her, was he the same with Zabini or Pansy? She didn't know. She felt like she didn't know him at all anymore.

Zabini sat his mug down and inclined his head a little in her direction looking like some sort of formal greeting.

She had the sudden urge to go talk to him. Did he know where Draco was? How Draco was? It had been reckless of her to visit him in the hospital wing and she was grateful that he had been asleep and stayed asleep the whole time she was there. But a small part couldn't help but imagine what it would have been like if he had woken up. If she had gotten to speak to him. Would she have told him?

"Come on, Hermione," Ron said loudly and she tore her eyes away from Zabini and to Ron who was standing up. "We don't want to be late for Charms."

He threw a dark look over to the Slytherin across the Hall. Zabini's lip curled slightly and then he turned back to his coffee.

Hermione stood up and tucked her wand into her pocket. She was keeping it close by her now even though Draco— Malfoy had been absent ever since his run-in with Harry in the bathroom. She half expected him to hunt her down again, but he had kept his distance. In fact, she hadn't seen him at all. But today they had class and she couldn't help but wonder if he would make an appearance.

"Mr. Nott!" Professor Flitwick squeaked at the end of class. "Mr. Nott, will you please take these to Mr. Malfoy?"

Malfoy.

Hermione turned around to see Nott slumping towards Flitwick on his pile of books and took a handful of parchment, crumpling it and shoving it in his bag while Flitwick looked on in disapproval.

A few Hufflepuffs congratulated Ron on his performance at the match and he ate it up, finally getting more attention for Quidditch than Harry was, since Harry had been in detention and unable to play.

Good. He deserves it for using that spell on Draco.

Hermione shook her head. What Harry did was wrong, but he hadn't meant to hurt Draco. Malfoy. He hadn't meant to hurt Malfoy. And anyways, Harry said that Malfoy tried to curse him first and honestly, she wasn't surprised. He wasn't the type to sit around and have long, meaningful conversations.

Well... except with her.

Hermione shook her hair back and lifted her head high. She was *making* herself get through this. Her heart might be breaking into smaller and smaller pieces, but she still had her

courage.

"My little Gryffindor kitten."

She shoved it forward and let it carry her down the corridor and to the Library where she spent her lunch with Neville, researching. And certainly not thinking about the table in the back of the Library with the large partition underneath it. Instead she was devoting herself to finding out more about the Half-Blood Prince.

Harry's potion book, the Prince's book, it was the cause of this. It had the spell in it that he had used on... Malfoy and she didn't trust it one bit. And she didn't trust the Prince. Who was this Halfblood Prince? How did he, or she, know all of this while they were just a student at Hogwarts and *who* was making spells like *that*?

She scoured records of students around the time of the books publication, but had no luck. But Hermione had spent more time in the Hogwarts Library than anyone else at the school and she had never given up before and she wasn't now.

As her lunch period ended Hermione packed up her bag again and headed down the stairs to Potions. She let her mind wander, hoping that something would come to her when she pushed open the door to the dungeon classroom and there he was.

Hermione stopped dead in the doorway.

Draco had his back to her, but like he somehow knew she was there, slowly turned his head over his shoulder and his storm grey eyes landed on hers.

She wasn't breathing. She wasn't moving. She wasn't doing anything but staring at him.

Draco's face was completely emotionless; only his rain grey eyes seemed to have any human quality to it and she saw a flicker of something that looked like desperation or longing before it quickly slithered away.

He kept his eyes on her though, trapping her in his gaze where she was too... weak to pull herself from it. Or maybe she just didn't want to. Or maybe she wanted to run to him. Or from him. Or—

"Hermione, over here!" Harry waved her over and Hermione finally came back into her body. Her legs moved stiffly as she walked over to her normal table with Harry, Ron, and Ernie MacMillan. She felt his eyes on her, but didn't look back over at him, instead placing herself carefully in between Harry and Ernie and set about taking out her book, wand, and quill.

She barely heard Slughorn as he gave a brief revision on Wit-Sharpening Solutions and then let them have at it. Hermione couldn't concentrate. Her hand kept shaking when she tried to pour in the armadillo bile and eventually set the vial down and rubbed her forehead.

Harry was working away beside her, struggling as he and Ron shared a copy of *Advanced Potion Making*. Harry's Prince copy was still hidden somewhere in the Room of Requirement and Hermione had the notion maybe to go look for it herself, but quickly banished it in fear of what else she might find in there. Or who else.

She did her best on her potion, knowing it wasn't her finest work and as soon as Slughorn dismissed them, waved her wand to vanish it and grabbed her bag, throwing it over herself

before she swept from the room.

She didn't stop until she was out of the dungeons, past the lower levels and two flights of stairs up. Only then did she lean against a cool wall and sink down to the floor.

Her heart was beating wildly in her chest and she wasn't entirely sure how because she was pretty sure it was lying in shreds somewhere around her navel, but the blood rushing under her skin was undeniable. Just like the mark branded into his.

Hermione ran her fingers into her hair and closed her eyes. *Oh God.*

She just wanted this to stop. Just wanted this to end. Just wanted... him.

Someone sat beside her.

Hermione looked over, mouth open in surprise when she saw Luna folding her legs up and looking dreamily at the wall across from them.

"Luna," she gasped. She was the last person that Hermione expected to see right now.

"Hello." Luna turned her pale blue eyes to Hermione.

"What... what are you doing here?" she asked, unable to make it sound any more polite.

"Sitting with you," Luna replied. Hermione continued to stare at her and Luna, mercifully, elaborated. "You seemed like you wanted to be alone. And if you're sitting here on your own people are going to stop and talk to you. But if they think you're with someone, they'll leave you be."

Luna's logic was... odd, but not incorrect. She was right after all. If people saw her sitting alone in a corridor, they would stop and ask if she was okay until she couldn't stand it and was forced to join in their company just to get people to leave her alone. Having Luna here... protected her from that.

Luna gave her a serene smile. "You can still be alone with me here."

Hermione blinked and turned to stare at the wall as Luna did so too. This was... a kindness she had not expected from a person she had not expected it from. Hermione made a mental note to make more of an effort with Luna. Ginny was Luna's best friend and now that she was dating Harry, Luna was sure to have more free time. Free time that Hermione could maybe try to spend with her.

She could do this; she could... move on. Start to live her life again. See her friends, re-read her favorite books, and brainstorm with Harry about potential Horcruxes. She had given so much of her time, her energy, *herself* to Draco this year and now that was over. Wasn't it? She couldn't possibly see a future where she and Draco—MALFOY were together.

...Right?

No.

She would devote all of that to helping Harry and Dumbledore and the Order. To making herself valuable to them, to being someone who they could use in the war that was surely coming.

She could be Hermione again. She never had been to him anyways.

“Thank you,” Hermione whispered.

Luna didn’t say anything, merely nodded and started humming happily to herself.

June rose quickly as days began to rush by. Professors started reviewing topics that they warned would come up on final exams, students wanted to spend the warm days out on the grounds instead of inside studying, and Draco Malfoy was drinking himself stupid every evening.

He stopped eating unless Blaise brought down food into the dungeons.

He stopped sleeping, unless he had passed out from the whisky.

He stopped going to class, unless Snape threw him into a classroom.

Draco lurked in the corridor, hanging out in a small dark alcove where some statue used to be and stared at the door to Ancient Runes where she was sitting somewhere on the other side.

It was too hard to be in the same room as her. To be so close to her and not be able to look at her, touch her, *talk* to her. *His* girl.

Was she still? Weasley was always around her now. Potter kept fucking off with the Weaslette, leaving Granger alone with Weasley way too fucking much. They ate together, walked together, and disappeared into their fucking common room together.

She was too fucking smart. She made sure she was never on her own anymore. If she wasn’t with Weasley, then it was Potter, and if it wasn’t with Potter then it was Weasley’s brat sister. Or Loony Lovegood. Or fat ass Longbottom. Or just a big fucking crowd like the one she had placed herself in before she slipped inside the Ancient Runes classroom, leaving him to stare at the door. She hadn’t made the same mistake twice of being caught in a corridor alone. Not after last time.

He could have gone in. Sat there. Stared at her. But he couldn’t drink in there.

Draco took a swig from a slim bottle and then tucked it back into his robes, sucking his teeth as he braced himself against the burn. He closed his eyes for a moment before opening them to glare at the door again.

What the fuck was he doing? Being a fucking prat, following around some girl that didn’t even want him anymore.

Yes she fucking did. Granger loved him. Granger loved him and she was his girl and she belonged with him.

Why couldn’t she see that?!

Because she had seen the mark.

He leaned back and took another drink. She had seen the mark and ran. She didn’t even know the worst things about it. She didn’t know what he had been sent back into Hogwarts to

do. She didn't know about his training sessions with his aunt Bellatrix. She didn't know that he was a fucking killer.

"Focus, Draco!" Bellatrix screeched. "You need to be ready, at a moment's notice. No thinking. Just reacting. Again!"

Draco aimed his wand at the furry face in front of him. The hound sat happily, tongue lolling out of the side of his long snout and panted.

Draco stared into the big, dark eyes of the dog he had raised from a pup. This was one of his prized hunting hounds. His father used to take him hunting. Before. Before the Dark Lord's return and he got too busy to do things like that anymore.

"Now!"

His hand shook. He pinched his lips in concentration.

"Like this," Bellatrix whipped her wand in front of her. "*Avada Kedavra!*"

The dog didn't yelp. It just collapsed into a pile of fur and bones, pink tongue still hanging out of its jaws.

Draco stared down at what had been his dog only moments before and was now just a dead thing at his feet.

"Call the other one over and try again. Focus this time!"

His vision slipped a little and Draco took a deep breath, steadying himself against the wall behind him. Bellatrix had made her way through half of his hunting pack before Draco had been able to produce green sparks. It took the other half in order for him to finally get it right.

He hadn't practiced all year. Not until the other day. Not until he realized that his only option, his only choice, was the same one it had always been— kill Dumbledore and then take his place as one of the Dark Lord's Death Eaters. For good. Forever.

And here he was, fucking about in a corridor hoping to catch a glimpse of her because he hadn't had a good one of her since this morning when she walked from the Greenhouses to go eat lunch with her friends. At least she had sat next to the Weaslette and talked to her mostly instead of that ginger prick who kept throwing long sad looks her way.

Draco wanted to pull the Weasel's glazed eyes out of his head and crush them under his heel. But he didn't. Because it would upset her. And he had done that enough.

So he stood there, in his shadowy little alcove and waited as the door to open and Babbling dismissed them. He recognized most of his classmates as they walked out, talking and laughing and joking and being so bloody happy he wanted to curse them all, but he didn't see her.

Where was she? She didn't skive off classes. Draco took a step forward, about to duck in to check for her when a curly mess of chestnut and caramel appeared falling around her face as she struggled with her oversized bag.

Fuck, she looked good today. Huffling a little as she tried to get her bag to close properly. She was balancing it on her thigh, making her skirt to lift up just a little, but enough for him

to get a quick look at her creamy thigh and holy fuck yes Salazar...

She gave a small noise of frustration and shoved it to the side. Her chocolate eyes found him as if they knew he was there the whole time. Draco hadn't stepped back into his shadowy alcove yet and she stopped moving when laid eyes on him.

It was like the other day in Potions; Granger was frozen in place, her cute little face dropping open in surprise and her eyes... fucking hell her eyes widened looking like two pools of melted chocolate and her pink lips parted and fuck... he could practically taste her, see her eyes fill with passion as he pushed himself in her, feel her thighs—

"Hey, you ready?" Weasley's dull, dumb voice called out from a little ways down the corridor.

Granger turned at the sound of it and he could see the apprehension slide into her expression.

Don't worry, Sweetheart. I'll take care of him. Then I'll take care of you.

"Uhm, yes," she said breathily and started towards Weasley.

Fuck. No. She couldn't go. Not when she was right here. Not with him.

"Granger," his voice was raspy from disuse.

Her head turned back in his direction and she looked almost terrified.

"Can..." Draco paused and took a step closer to her. "Can we talk?"

Say yes. Fucking say yes, Granger.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

"Come on, Harry and Ginny are already—" Weasley stopped talking as he saw Draco standing there. His expression changed from cheerful to sour as soon as his eyes landed on him.

Granger turned her head quickly between the two of them, making her loose curls twist and bounce.

Granger's curls bouncing and she fucked herself on his fingers. Granger's curls in his fingers as he ran his hand through her hair. Granger's curls spread out around her as he lowered himself into her.

"Yes." Draco felt something rise up in him. Yes. She said yes! *Take that you fucker.* "Let's go."

Shit. She had been talking to *him*. To Weasley.

She started past Weasley who was still glaring at Draco, looking like he wished he could curse people with his eyes alone. Draco knew how he felt and if Granger wasn't standing right fucking there, he would have pulled out his wand and taught the Weasel a lesson he wouldn't soon forget— that Granger was *his* girl and he *wasn't* sharing.

Draco felt a sick coldness spread through him and Granger and the Weasel walked away from him down the corridor.

“What did he want?” Weasley asked her, leaning in close.

Get the fuck away from her.

“Nothing,” she shook her head. “Same as Zabini, just wanted help with Potions.”

“Glad to see you learned your lesson.”

“What?” she gasped and stopped walking.

The fuck did you just say? Draco took a quick step towards them.

“I’m glad you’re not doing it anymore. Helping out Slytherins.”

“Yeah... right.” Granger turned and started walking again. Weasley followed after her, staying close to her and glaring back at Draco one last time as they reached the far end of the corridor and then out of sight.

Draco pulled out the bottle and took a long drink.

“She’s not helping anyone, asshole. She’s fucking me. She’s fucking me because she loves me. Me, not you, *me*.”

Draco looked to his left and saw a small Ravenclaw boy looking at him with shock and terror on his face.

Shit.

He glowered at the little boy who gasped and stiffened with fear. There was a time Draco would have hexed him, just for fun. But now... he leaned over and hissed in the little boy’s face which paled to the shade of death and he almost fell over in his desperate scramble to get away from the sixth year Slytherin whom he’d surely been warned about.

Draco took another quick drink and stuck the cork back in the slim bottle before tucking it back in his robes and deciding to follow Granger down to the Great Hall and fucking stalk her through dinner and then up to her common room, where he’d pick out another nice dark corner in the corridor outside and finish his whisky while he’d sit and stare at the side of another wall keeping him from her.

Hermione breathed in deeply as she climbed through the portrait hole. She hadn’t given up on trying to find out more about the Prince and since Harry and Ginny were... taking some time for themselves she thought it was a good night to return to the Library and do some research.

Ron had offered to come with her, in fact, he practically insisted.

“You’ve got your Transfiguration you need to finish,” Hermione chided.

“I can work on it there.”

“You’re almost done. It would take you twice as long if you pack it all up, walk all the way down there, unpack it all, and then try to start working again.”

“I don’t mind,” Ron said with a smile, blue eyes crinkling around the sides.

Hermione sighed. She had enjoyed having Ron with her recently and it had been nice to have the comfort of her best friend but... she had to start living her life again. She had been careful to not run into him, but Malfoy seemed to be just as happy to leave her be.

Except for this evening. She'd have to think on that.

Another reason for Ron *not* to come with her.

He had been so considerate lately, but she knew he also liked the fact he had someone to hang out with all the time now that Harry and Ginny were together. Ron was a social person and thrived off of interaction. He had been attached at the hip, and *other places*, to Lavender when they were dating and once they broke up, he took up his mantle as Harry's right hand man again.

Now that Harry was... happily distracted Ron had latched himself onto her. There might have been residual other reasons, but she wasn't focusing on those. All she was doing was appreciating the fact that she had a friend who she could spend her time with while she tried to nurse the wound Draco had left when he ripped out her heart.

But it didn't mean that she needed him to follow her around constantly. She was trying to put her life back together and part of that meant getting back to things she had always done; like spending time in the Library, burying herself in a book in order to find the answers to questions that her brain kept coming up with.

And Harry and his awful Potions book was the perfect distraction right now.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Ron asked as she stood up.

Hermione sighed. She wasn't. But she was trying to be. "I will be. Thank you for asking," she added, giving him another small smile.

Ron breathed out heavily as his lips split in a wide grin. She watched him reach out for her and it looked like he was going to touch her hand. Hermione lifted it to tuck a lock of curls behind her ear, looking down at her feet.

"You know, I'll just come with you. Who knows? Maybe I'll actually read one of the books in there this time."

"Ronald, if you don't sit back down and finish your Transfiguration I will put a permanent sticking charm on you and that chair." Hermione's smile spread a little bit. She was trying. She was... getting there. Somewhere.

Ron grinned up at her again and relented. "Fine, fine.... Godric, I never thought I'd see the day when Hermione Granger *didn't* want someone to go to the Library."

Hermione gave a small laugh and Ron's head shot up.

"Oh... wow..." he gaped at her.

"What?"

"That's... that's the first time you've laughed since..."

Hermione's smile faltered and she felt the heaviness settle back in her.

"I won't be too long." She didn't want to talk about that. She didn't want to think about him because when she did she couldn't help but remember the way he had called out her name. *Her name*.

"I'll be here," Ron's face was warm and bright. Strangely enough, she felt guilty as she looked back at him before heading out into the corridor. She gave herself the walk to the Library to ponder this.

Hermione knew Ron's feelings weren't all friend-like ones, some of them were... deeper. And she knew what it was like to have feelings for someone who considered you a friend instead of returning them. She also knew what it was like to have feelings for someone who hated your very being. The feelings she had for Draco were *very* different from any of the feelings she had ever harbored for Ron.

She let that line of thinking fall back into the recesses of her mind as she browsed the shelves, looking for something that might lead her to a clue as to who the Halfblood Prince was.

She paused. It was... *Half-Blood*, not Halfblood. The Prince had put a hyphen in the word... why? Hermione blinked as her brows pulled together. She felt her brain start to fire up, moving quickly, racing as she questioned, sorted, and organized this information.

Maybe the Prince wasn't a Halfblood and after all, it was normally Purebloods who cared about blood purity and it was odd for someone to *boast* about being Halfblood. She tilted her head. There were people who did that though, as if it made them any better than Muggleborns. They claimed to be above the barbaric Muggleborns, even if it was just by one rung on the ladder. A ladder the Purebloods would never let them climb.

So if the Prince wasn't talking about his or her blood status then... maybe they were half a *prince*? But she had *gone* through the annals of wizarding history, looking for any reference to royals or titles or positions. The only ones she had ever found were Purebloods centuries ago who had held certain positions in the Muggle court like Brutus Malfoy who she had read about in—

Her mouth dropped open. Why hadn't she thought of it before?! "*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*" documented every Pureblood born into the British families; maybe there was someone who *had* married into some sort of title or... no. They wouldn't *marry*. Maybe a title was bestowed on one? Or—

Oh Godric! Hermione squealed and nearly tripped in her effort to turn as quickly as she could towards the Restricted Section and Hogwarts copy of "*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*" even if it was an abridged version, it still contained the names and she couldn't believe it took her this long to figure it out—

The prince wasn't a title, it was a *name*.

She whispered the password and pushed the creaking gate open, hurrying forward.

Half-Blood Prince! She could see the scrawled black ink on the inside of Harry's book so clearly in her mind now. It was hyphenated. It was capitalized. It was a *name*!

Hermione turned down the thin aisle she had found the book before and skimmed her eyes until... wait. No. This wasn't the right aisle at all.

She looked around. Yes it was. Right, left, straight, left...

Right? That... that was the way she went, wasn't it? But the book wasn't here. This wasn't even the right section. This was all about raising dangerous beasts and how to... goodness, breed chimeras for battle.

Oh no... She had gotten lost. She had been in such a hurry to get here that she didn't pay attention to how the Restricted Section twisted, turned, and changed. Normally she was able to keep her wits about her and not get distracted, but she had just been so excited that she finally figured it out. She had felt like her old self again and it was the best she had felt in—

"Hermione."

Her spine turned to stone and then crumbled inside her.

It was his voice, his deep, low voice, but it was saying her name.

She couldn't turn around. She couldn't move. Her brain wasn't working right. It had screeched to a halt and everything had crashed forward and she couldn't... couldn't...

"I've been looking for you."

No... no no no. It was too much. She was shaking. This evening in the hall had been hard enough to see him standing there, bloodshot eyes and rumpled clothes, but *not here*. Not in *this* place.

"Fucking turn around."

That was more like it. Snapping and snarling. That was the Malfoy she knew. Malfoy, because she had never known Draco. It had all been a lie. It couldn't have been real because then she would be in love with a Death Eater and she couldn't—

He grabbed her arm, spinning her around to face him. Hermione looked up into his grey eyes, storming like a hurricane. He hadn't sounded angry a minute ago, but now his rage seemed to seep from him like a poisonous gas. His fingers twitched on her arm and she gasped as he dug them in a little further.

Touching her, Draco was touching her. It had been so long since he'd touched her and she felt her skin heat up under his hand, missing it, craving it.

Draco wasn't touching her, *Malfoy* was touching her. A Death Eater was touching her. Hermione jerked away from him and his eyes stormed above her, marble face twisting as the anger behind it turned him cold.

"You don't get to touch me anymore," she said, voice shaking but firm. She had been doing so good, *so good*, but now she felt... felt it all. All the hurt, all the love and it was all so confusing! It was crashing in. *She* was crashing in. Draco was looking down at her and... no... her thin line of defense was falling down down down...

Draco... She still felt like his.

But she wasn't. She wasn't his little plaything anymore and she wasn't his girl anymore either. She was Hermione Granger, and she wasn't going to fall for any more of his tricks. Or him.

Hermione whipped out her wand and held it out in front of her.

“Great minds,” Malfoy smirked. His own was pointed right at her, right at her heart.

“There is *nothing* similar about you and I,” she snapped. *Hex him, curse him. Do anything but talk to him.*

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” He mused then his expression darkened. “Did you feel it? When I touched you? Did you feel how fucking *good* we are?”

No. No no no no no no no.

“Stay back.”

Draco’s eyes gleamed like silver. “No.”

“*Impedimenta!*”

Hermione turned and ran. Draco swore behind her and she knew the jinx would only slow him down for a moment. But that was all she needed. Just a few extra moments to get out of here and back—

A stream of light shot past her, hitting the shelf she had just rounded. The way back to the gate should have been clear but she’d already gotten turned around once tonight so she glanced at the shelves next to her, hoping to find a clue as to where she was so she could try and find her way out of here.

His footsteps were getting louder. She didn’t have time. Picking a random aisle, Hermione tore down it. She could hear him behind her and threw another jinx over her shoulder. She... she didn’t want to hurt him, she just wanted to get away.

More books crashed to the floor and she knew he must have blocked it, sending it into the stacks. Hermione kept running, left, right, right, left, straight, right, it didn’t matter, all that mattered was she kept moving. Eventually she’d find her way out, right?

Wrong.

Hermione slowed. She couldn’t hear him anymore, not over the beating of her own heart in her ears. She took a few gulps of breath and looked around. She had been here before, the section on curses and other nasty spells. This was where...

Hermione looked at the wall of books. This was where it had all started. Where they had...

A cold realization crept over her. He hadn’t fallen back, she hadn’t outrun him. Draco’s legs were much longer than hers and... no. Hermione took a step away from the shelves. He had led her here, herded her here.

Just like the Death Eaters had in the Department of Mysteries last year.

Oh God! That’s what this was like! Her dreams! Running down dark corridors, chased by a Death Eater. By him.

“I knew you’d come back, pet.” He sounded so smug.

Hermione looked at the end of the aisle. Draco— *Malfoy* was standing there, dressed in black, the only thing missing was the metal mask. Same voice, same stance, same silver eyes she had haunted her sleep so many times.

She wasn't going to let this end the same way. That was a dream and this was real. His mark was real.

She sent a silent stunning spell at him which he nimbly jumped to the side to avoid. Damn Seeker. But then she heard a pained grunt and Draco grasped the side of his stomach, bending over slightly.

His wounds! He must have been hurt still from his duel with Harry. From that awful Prince's spell and part of her stunning spell must have grazed him.

"Draco!" Hermione called out before she could stop herself and rushed towards him.

Oh, she didn't mean to hurt him! She hoped it was all right, maybe she could—

Draco stood up tall and shoved his dark wand against her chest, silver eyes shining triumphantly. Hermione's heart fell.

Another lie. And she'd fallen for it.

"*Incarcerous*." He smirked and Hermione felt thick ropes wrap around her, snaking up her body, pinning her arms to her frame tightly. They coiled around her, tightening. She jerked against them, trying to fight them off and fell against the shelves heavily.

Draco reached out and grabbed her, pushing her back into the thick books and held her there with his solid body.

"Get off me!" she screamed and tried to twist her wrist to aim her wand back at him but he pried it from her fingers, sneering at her.

"Behave, Granger," he growled.

She stilled. Oh God, she didn't mean to, but she did. *No...* Hermione whimpered. She didn't want him to have this hold on her. But he did. Oh God, he did.

"Good girl," his voice slid over her like velvet and Hermione turned her face away from him, closing her eyes.

"Oh Sweetheart, don't hide those pretty eyes," he cooed. "Look at me."

No. She didn't want to see his rain grey eyes. She didn't want to see *him*.

"Granger..." he said patronizingly, as if she was an errant child. "*Look at me.*"

He grabbed her face and turned it back towards him. She kept her eyes closed tightly, shaking in his grasp. If she opened her eyes, if she looked at him he would see. He would be able to look in her mind and see that she still loved this. Honestly, he probably would be able to see it just on her face, plain as day.

He sighed. "Have it your way then," and tapped his wand against her temple.

The pressure behind her eyes filled her head and then he was there.

Hello, Sweetheart.

No...

Images upon images of Draco surged forward, every touch, every glance, every kiss... *everything.*

He sorted through them quickly, lingering on... more pleasant ones and making her see them again. She didn't want to. She didn't want to think about them or him. Not knowing what he was now. Then he was lying in the water next to her. She was unbuttoning his shirt and there it was. The awful black mark on his porcelain white arm.

She stared down at it, just like she had that night, refusing to accept, but unable to reject the proof. She felt Draco pulled back from that memory, shoving it hard to the side and pulling up the chaise, the Forest, the Library...

Hermione whimpered. It felt like her heart was breaking all over again.

Then Ron. Ron over and over. Laughing, joking, studying, eating. Ron reaching for her hand tonight, her lifting it away to tuck her hair back. Ron smiling at her, telling her a joke at lunch the other day. Ron's arm around her, crying into his chest and— *ow!*

"You're not serious with whoever it is and... I am. I'm serious." Ron moving closer, his lips parting. *"Let me show you."*

*"I will **always** be here for you."*

What had Harry told her about Occlumency? She had to clear her mind, make it empty. He had hated those lessons, and she had tried to help him by going over the tactics—

Draco took a sharp turn in her mind, making her spin.

Potter?

Then it was all Harry.

Years and years of friendship. Playing Quidditch, summers at the Burrow, helping Sirius escape, D.A. meetings, researching, Harry lying in the hospital wing, the Hall of Prophecies, Lucius Malfoy holding out his hand...

She could feel Draco push that memory away into the back of her mind. More recent memories flooded forward.

"Of course, Harry, you're my best friend. I'll always be here for you."

"I don't know what I would do without you, Hermione."

"You'll never have to find out. Like it or not you're stuck with me. I'm not going anywhere."

Harry... no. Draco couldn't see the things Harry talked about with her; his lessons with Dumbledore, discussions about Voldemort.

As soon as she thought his name she felt Malfoy recoil. Thank Godric. She barely had time to take a breath and register this before he pressed in again.

“He’s a Death Eater, that’s what he was doing in Borgin and Burkes!”

“He’s up to something in the Room of Requirement and I’m going to find out what it is.”

“I wished you believed me. About Malfoy.”

He pressed harder and felt her hesitation towards Harry’s theory, that she didn’t believe *her* Draco could do that. Would do that.

The pressure decreased, feeling a bit more like a heavy blanket than a crushing weight.

Good girl.

Hermione tried to push him away, physically and mentally.

Draco dove back in.

The hospital wing. Sitting there, staring at him while he slept. Talking to him, telling him... everything. Everything she couldn’t say when he was awake.

“I thought I loved you.”

His lips crashed onto hers. Draco grabbed onto her face, forcing it open for him to snake his tongue in, tasting her. No... please... if he didn’t stop soon she wouldn’t... wouldn’t.... *would kiss him back.*

No... why... why was he doing this? Making her relive this? The painful surge of love that she felt in that moment. The heartbreak as she realized he was never who she thought he was.

It hurt. Feeling this again *hurt*. Hermione did the only thing she could think of to get him out; she hurt him back.

“I want to forget you.”

He pulled himself from her mind and her mouth, breathing heavily.

Hermione’s eyes opened and she looked up at him, dizzy and disoriented from his intrusion. She was barely able to hold herself up and was pretty sure that if the books weren’t behind her and Draco wasn’t pressing his body into hers she would simply sink to the floor.

“You want to forget?” Malfoy breathed out heavily, angrily. “Is that what you want? You want to forget me?” His minty breath spread across her face, cool against her wet lips, but mixed with just a hint of fire whisky. He wasn’t drunk, but he had been drinking.

“You think you can just forget how it *felt*? How *I* felt?” he growled. “I saw it, Granger. I saw how you felt when I was inside you, fucking you. How much you love it, love me.”

Hermione struggled against the ropes holding her.

“I know you remember. It felt *so good*, didn’t it, Sweetheart?” His voice was hoarse, desperate. “I can make you feel it again.”

Fear spiked through her. She couldn’t breathe. She couldn’t breathe in to scream, to do anything but stare up into his hungry eyes, boring back down into her.

“I’m going to make you forget,” he panted, pressing his wand back to her face. “That’s what you want, kitten, isn’t it? And don’t I always give you what you want?” He ground his

hips against her.

No... this couldn't be happening.

Draco buried his face into her neck, biting it hard. He dragged his lips up to her ear, breathing heavily into it and pressed himself harder against her as she began to violently struggle.

"It's not going to hurt." She could feel his lips pulling up against her ear in some version of a smile. "I promise. It's going to feel just like before."

"Stop... please..." Hermione's voice cracked.

He pressed the tip of his wand harder against her temple. "I'm going to make you forget you ever saw it. Forget my mark. I'm going to take it all away, the hurt, the pain. It's going to feel so good, I promise. It'll be just like before."

Her body shook as relief and revulsion both passed through it. He wasn't going to hurt her, but he was going to... violate her. Her mind, her memories. He was going to take it away and she wouldn't know anymore. She'd feel just like she had and she'd... she'd love him.

Hermione twisted against the ropes, knowing it was useless, but unable to stand there without at least trying. She felt betrayed. Betrayed by the part of her that wanted him to. In a few seconds, Malfoy could make all the agony of the past week go away. He could give her back the bubbles, the feeling she missed so much. The love. He could give her back Draco.

"Please..." she cried softly. "Draco, please don't... Don't do this."

He was gasping for breath, pressing his head against hers. He was... struggling with this. He... he didn't want to do this, not really. He just wanted it back, just like her. And this was the way his twisted, dark mind had come up to achieve it.

"I can't..." he breathed out. "I can't stand this. I have to have you. You can't leave me."

"Please..." Hermione begged again, feeling his muscles straining. "If you..." she gulped down a breath, this was her one and only weapon and if it didn't work... "If you love me, don't do this."

Malfoy growled from deep within and slammed his hand into the shelf next to her head. Hermione flinched. At least his wand wasn't pressed into her temple anymore. Draco was still on her, but her gambit had earned her a few inches of space from the threat of Obliviation.

"You... you wanted to talk. I— I want that too." It was the truth. She had tried to avoid it, to ignore it, but there were things she wanted, *needed* to know.

"No. You don't." Malfoy sounded like he was in pain.

"Because of earlier? I... I was scared. But... I'm not. Not with you."

He wasn't going to hurt her. He didn't want to. He had a chance and didn't take it. He had multiple chances, and had never taken them. Hermione let out a small sobbing breath, her chest shaking with it. That statement was true on both fronts.

Draco lifted his head and looked at her. His eyes were rimmed with red and... a little wet. The muscle in his jaw was tensed and twitching. His granite grey eyes were unshielded and

searching hers, not prying into her, in fact like were almost pleading.

“You’re not scared of me?” he asked, blinking away the faint line of moisture.

Hermione bit her trembling lip and shook her head. “Not of you.” Not of Draco. And he was. She could try and call him Malfoy all she wanted, but he was, *this* was, still Draco.

Mark and all.

His expression eased a little. “You left with him.”

“I... I know.”

“You left me.”

“You deserved it.”

She might have been tied up and trapped by him, but she was still Hermione Granger and her Gryffindor Pride was as strong as ever, no matter how weak her heart felt right now.

Draco pulled back a little. “I know.”

She couldn’t believe it. He... he was agreeing with her?

“Will you let me go?”

Draco’s grey eyes stormed. “No.”

Hermione felt a shiver run down her spine. “Please take the ropes off.”

Draco looked down, running his hand over them. Then down her arm, then grabbed her hand. Hermione let him twist his fingers into hers, trying to keep herself upright as her chest collapsed in on itself a little.

“Draco,” she said his name softly. “Please.”

“You’ll run.” He said it sadly, like a misbehaved child.

“I won’t.” She meant it. Draco lifted his eyes up to hers. “I promise.”

He studied her for a few moments. Did he still trust her? She had tricked him last time. No... now way Draco was going to fall for—

He tapped the ropes with his wand and they fell away, landing heavily on the floor around her. Hermione was shocked into stillness.

Draco took a step back and ran his hand through his hair. She was shaky on her own and still felt a little dizzy. “I need to sit down,” she said in a small voice. Hermione sunk down to the floor, rubbing her arms as she did so.

She had said she wouldn’t run. She had meant it. She had meant everything.

He took the place directly across from her against the other shelves. Stretching one leg out, he bent the other and rested his elbow on his knee, holding his wand lazily in front of him, vaguely pointing it in her direction.

Draco bent his head, but kept his eyes on her. He wouldn’t meet her gaze instead choosing different parts of her to train his eyes on. Anything that wasn’t her face.

Well, at least he was staying on his side of the narrow aisle. She supposed that was as much as she could ask for right now. She reached out and grabbed her wand off of the floor where it had fallen. Draco didn't move to stop her.

"Are you going to jinx me again?" he asked glumly.

Good Godric, he was *pouting*.

"Do I need to?" she asked him back, raising her chin a little. She had agreed not to run, but if he made one false move she was not going to hesitate to stand her ground.

Draco shook his head. He didn't say anything for a few long moments and then pulled a thin bottle out from inside his robes and popped the cork on it, taking a large swig of the amber liquid inside.

"So you're drinking again."

Draco shrugged. "My girlfriend left me."

Her bruised heart flared to life. Why was he saying this *now*? Now that it was too late? Now that he was a— but no, he'd been a Death Eater all along. Still...

"Girlfriend?"

"Girlfriend. Whore. Girl I lo—" he sighed and lifted the bottle to his lips again. "You know what you are."

No. She had no idea what or who she was to him anymore. She should, but she didn't.

"I thought I was just a Mudblood to your kind. Isn't that what your *Lord* calls us?"

Draco's eyes cut back up to hers. He wanted to talk? He wanted to hear what she had to say? *Fine*.

Draco didn't reply. He drank instead.

"I'm not going to have this conversation with myself," she snapped, anger flaring up from her nerves. "And I'm not going to have it with you if you're drunk. I had enough of your inane babble the other night, thank you very much!"

Draco paused and then slowly put the cork back in the bottle and tucked it back inside his robes. "Better?" he asked.

Hermione glared at him. Yes. No. She didn't know. Nothing about this was good or better.

"You said you wanted to talk?" he asked, putting it forth as if he was doing *her* a favor.

Angry flames heated up inside her. He had followed her here, attacked her, invaded her private thoughts and then almost stole them. And he was going to sit there and act moody now?

Why was she even bothering to try and talk to him? If he had his way he would plunge her back into the darkness and lies she had been living in for months. And he would keep her there. With him.

And she wanted to be with him. She wanted to be with him so much it made her bones quake. She wanted him not to be a Death Eater, not to be a Purist, not to be a liar.

But he was all of those things. And Godric help her, she still loved him.

“What’s the point?” Hermione leaned her head back and looked up at the floating blue candles overhead.

“You’re not dying to ask me annoying-ass questions?”

“No.” She watched one of the candles float until it passed out of her line of sight.

She heard Draco shift across from her. “Why not?”

“You won’t tell me the truth anyways. You’ve been lying to me this whole time. Why would you suddenly be honest now?”

She brought her eyes back down to see Draco staring at her, his expression unreadable again, hidden away behind his marble mask. Of course. That’s what he’d always done. Run and hide. Every time she did something he didn’t like he had stormed off, he had—

He stuck his hand back in his robes. Great, he was going to drink some more. Same Draco as he’d always been. Hermione sighed. So why did everything feel so different now?

“Here’s to you, Sweetheart,” he muttered and she looked up to see a small clear vial in his hand before he tossed it back, swallowing the contents whole.

He closed his eyes as he gulped and took a deep breath before opening them again.

“What did you just take?” she whispered.

“I’ve been in Potions with you for six years, Granger, don’t try and tell me you don’t recognize Veritaserum when you see it.”

Good Godric. Had he really?

“You know taking that alongside having alcohol in your system—”

“Enhances the effects, yeah,” Draco dropped the empty vial into his pocket. “I’m aware.”

It would be near impossible for him to lie to her now. He was cunning, but... it would compel him to tell the truth, making him speak, and combined with the alcohol it would be extremely difficult for him to fight it. Both were inebriating substances and mixing them together was never advised.

Hermione gaped at him.

“Have at it, Granger,” he spread his arms wide. “I’m all yours.”

Oh... Wow. She blinked her eyes wide. She could ask him... anything. Anything and would get the truth, at least, for the most part. He might be able to tweak certain things, but—

“How do I know you won’t just get up and leave when I ask something you don’t like?”

Draco gave her a wry smile. “Like I’m going to let anyone else catch me in this condition. Only you, Granger, you know that.”

Oh my... okay. She had to make the most of this. She needed information, for Harry, for the war. She had to be smart about this, strategic.

"Where is Lord Voldemort?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "I don't know."

She eyed him. He could be able to say that, thinking along the lines that he did not know exactly where Voldemort was at this *exact* second, but... she couldn't second guess everything. It was better to move the line of questioning along and get what she could while she could.

"Where is Bellatrix Lestrange?"

"My Manor. Next."

Good Godric. She had a Death Eater willing to spill all his secrets but *why*? Why had he taken that potion? Why was he sitting here across from her? Why was he letting her ask everything she wanted?

The answer was hidden in the grey of his eyes, hazy, but there. Beating against the black, like a fist, like a heartbeat.

"Your Manor? You're living with her?"

"I'm living at Hogwarts currently," his eyes narrowed slightly. "Do you want to sit here and talk about all my relatives or do you want to get down to what you *really* care about?"

"And what's that?" Hermione snipped.

Draco smirked. "Me."

"You think I'm going to give up an opportunity to interrogate a Death Eater?" she narrowed her eyes and made sure she made her tone harsh.

Draco clenched his jaw and cast his eyes to the side. "If all you care about is information on the Dark Lord then you should just hand me over to Dumbledore and his lot and let them torture it out of me."

"They wouldn't do that," Hermione countered.

Draco let out a sharp laugh. "You must not know much about your precious Order then, Granger."

"And you do?" she breathed out. The Order did... what they had to, but torture? She had a hard time imagining Kingsley Shacklebolt or Remus Lupin casting the Cruciatus curse on anyone.

"Like you said," Draco dragged his eyes back to hers. They were hard and cold. "I'm a Death Eater."

There it was. He said the words. The actual words. The truth.

Draco sucked his teeth and looked away from her again.

"I'll tell you what you want to know, but you've just got to decide what you want to know most."

She pulled herself up a little straighter and stared hard at him. "Just because you rifled through my mind doesn't mean you know what I—"

"Oh, but you told me."

She froze.

"In the hospital wing. Snape jinxed me, but I was awake, just petrified. But I heard *everything*."

Hermione blanched. He had shifted through her memories of that night, but... he had known this whole time. He knew she loved him and from the gleam in his eye she could tell it was driving him mad. His black shirt was wrinkled, his hands shaking, and his eyes were bloodshot. Whether that was from the fire whisky, lack of sleep, or... anything else she wasn't sure. But it was obvious that Draco was breaking.

And this man sitting slumped against the dark shelves across from her was what was left. The man who had followed her, chased her, attacked her, and forced himself into her mind.

She knew the answer, but wanted him to have to say it. "Why were you going to modify my memories?"

"So you'd come back to me." Draco lifted his eyes up to her, storm grey and full of thundering pain and lightning strikes of shame until he couldn't hold her gaze anymore and dropped them back down. "So you'd love me."

"Did you really think that would work?" Hermione asked harshly. "What about the next time I saw it? Would you just go on, meddling in my mind each time?"

Draco stared at the floor. "If I needed to," he said sullenly.

Hermione felt her anger rise up. How selfish could he be?! Lying to her, tricking her, taking her memories... but he hadn't. He had stopped himself. Just like the night in the destroyed classroom, Draco had stopped *himself*.

"Why did you go through my memories then? If you already knew what was in there. The hospital wing, the... the mark," she couldn't help but whisper it.

"I wanted you to remember. Remember how good we are together. Remember me."

"And Ron and Harry? Those have nothing to do with you, you had no right to spy in on those—"

"I wanted to see how you felt about Weasley. And you brought up Potter. I was just... curious."

"Curious?" He was *curious* so he broke into her mind?

"You said he knew. I wanted to see for myself."

"You could have asked me," she countered.

"You could have lied." Draco lifted his eyes back up to hers, face set like stone.

"That's *your* move, Draco, not mine."

"You lied to me in the closet."

"So did you."

Draco shifted a little. Hermione tilted her head and narrowed her eyes.

"Technically," he started, 'I never lied.' Hermione was about to open her mouth to *scream* at him when Draco held up a finger. "You asked if I was in trouble. I'm not. You are."

"Is that a threat?" she snapped.

Draco leaned forward, storm grey eyes locked onto hers. "That is most definitely a threat."

Hermione raised her wand up.

"You really think I'd hurt you?" Draco asked softly.

Hermione faltered for half a second. She... she wasn't sure. Yes she was. Hermione lowered her wand.

"So why am I in danger then?"

"Granger, you're a Mu—"

"I thought you didn't use that word anymore."

Draco sneered at her. "I was going to say Muggleborn."

Hermione glared back at him. "Sure you were."

"Veritaserum," he quipped and Hermione blinked. Oh. Right.

"So why are Muggleborns in danger?" she said, trying to direct him back.

"It won't be long now before we make our move. Once I—" Draco winced as he tried to stop talking. "Once I... finish."

"Finish what?"

"My task," he said through clenched teeth.

"Which is?" Hermione leaned forward.

Draco was obviously trying to hold this back. His muscles were straining and a vein stood out on the side of his neck. "Murder."

The word was forced from him, spilling all the air from his lungs with it. Draco gasped in a breath, trying to get himself under control.

"Murder... Dumbledore?" Hermione had suspected as much. She had spent enough time thinking about the attacks when Ron was in the hospital wing and everyone knew that both of them were designated for Dumbledore, but had failed to reach him.

Draco was breathing heavily and looked up at her from under heavy lids. "Yes."

"Why?"

“He’s the fucking head of the Order of the Phoenix, Granger, why the fuck do you think the Dark Lord wants him dead?” he snapped. The Veritaserum had placed the truth in there, but it did nothing to stop Draco from being cruel in his answers. The alcohol surely enhanced that as well.

“Don’t talk to me like that. I’m not your *girlfriend* anymore, remember?”

There. That shut him up.

And it shut her up for a little bit too. Maybe she wasn’t ready for those kinds of comments either.

Draco looked down at the floor. “I miss you.”

She *definitely* wasn’t ready for those.

“Let’s stay on topic.”

“Is that what you want to do? Ask me questions about the Dark Lord? Sorry to disappoint, but I don’t have many answers for you.”

Hermione sat up. “Then let’s talk about you.”

She watched his face turn back into the marble mask. Cold. Distant. Formal.

Beautiful.

“Draco,” she said softly and his granite eyes softened to rain grey. Either he was letting her in or the potion was making it hard for him to mask his emotions because she could see his apprehension and anxiety breaking through. He was nervous. Oh God, his hand was shaking. “Why did you... take the mark?”

He closed his eyes and swallowed. A muscle in his neck twitched. Then his arm.

“You of course know about my father and what happened last year.”

“Yes,” Hermione’s voice was soft. “I was there.”

Draco opened his eyes and looked right at her. “Right. Well, as you’re aware he failed in his mission. He was arrested and sent to Azkaban.”

“That doesn’t answer the question.”

“I took his place.” The words slipped from his lips so fast he seemed surprised to hear them as well. Draco let out a long breath and then allowed them to flow freely.

“In order to save my family and the Malfoy name I agreed to replace my father as the Dark Lord’s servant. He gave me a task, one only I could do. Once I have completed it, I will be expected to return to my Master and—”

Draco winced and drew his arm in close to him. His left arm.

“Are you okay?”

Draco shook his head. “It hurts. All the time. If I think about it, or... talk about it, it’s worse.”

“Is it supposed to do that?”

“We are supposed to feel it at all times. A reminder of our oath.”

Hermione felt sick hearing him use words like servant and Master and oath. Draco took a deep breath and uncurled his arm before continuing. “Then I will take my place as one of his Death Eaters in his circle. My father will be released and be allowed to return home.”

Hermione tried to commit every word to memory. She wanted to go through it all carefully and pick apart any detail, every minute bit of information when she had the time.

“Did you want to?”

“No.” Again it came out quick, sudden.

She felt like a weight had been lifted from her, one she hadn’t realized she had been holding. He hadn’t chosen this fate; he had been pushed into it. But... Did that change anything really? It didn’t make him *stop* being a Death Eater just because he didn’t want to be one and based on his previous answer he had no question in how he would be leading his life from now on.

“Did you believe him when he said he would release your father?” Voldemort was not known for his mercy and Lucius had failed him terribly by letting the prophecy get destroyed. It was a miracle he was even still alive.

Draco’s head shot up and his eyes widened. “What else was I supposed to do? Let him rot in there? Let him die?” he snarled and then sighed. “But that’s what I’m doing now so... I suppose I’m just as much of a failure as he is.”

“What are you talking about?”

“My father is dying. The Ministry won’t do anything to help him. They sent a healer, yes, but...” he scoffed. “It’s that place. And I can get him out, today. But I’m sitting here fucking talking to you instead.”

His mindless dribble the other night made a little more sense now; at least, she thought it did.

“You don’t want to do it. You don’t want to...” *kill* “hurt anyone.”

“There are plenty of people I want to hurt, Sweetheart.” His eyes were as hard as granite as he brought them back up to hers.

Crafty. Just like Harry had said.

“You don’t want to be a killer.”

“Already am.” He sighed and leaned his head back against the books behind him.

Hermione’s eyes went wide. She lost the feeling in her fingers for a moment and almost dropped her wand before she quickly squeezed it hard in her hand. He had already killed someone. The man, the boy, sitting in front of her, the one she had been sleeping with for months, the one she had fallen for, was a murderer.

“You... you killed someone?” This changed everything.

“A Muggle.” Draco lifted his head back up. He looked disgusted and Hermione opened her mouth to reprimand him for his view of Muggles when she realized his revulsion was for himself. “A few days before I had you jack me off at Leaky,” he added with a cold smirk.

He was trying to hurt her because it was all he knew how to do. He had never bared his soul to anyone before. He probably barely ever allowed himself to delve this deep down, instead choosing to drink these thoughts away.

“Tell me.” Hermione steeled herself. She wanted to know what kind of man he was. She needed to know who she was in love with.

“Christmas night, a few of us went... celebrating,” he shook his head. ‘Found a little family. Bellatrix played with the kids.’ Draco’s eyes glazed over. “Rabastan entertained the wife.” He gripped his wand so tight his knuckles turned white. “And Uncle Rodolphus and I discussed the finer points of the Crutiatius curse with their father.”

Hermione stared unbelievably at him. This... this couldn’t be real. Couldn’t be true.

“I left him on the floor and Bellatrix set the house on fire.” His voice was hollow, empty.

Something in Hermione’s brain jumped. “Christmas... Draco, was this near Gloucester?”

He stared at her for a moment before barely nodding.

“You... you know they got out, right?”

He was so still, she could have sworn he turned into a marble statue.

“I remember reading about this in the Prophet. They made it out. Aurors and Healers reported to the scene, they were hurt, badly, but... they’re alive.”

He wasn’t moving. He didn’t blink, he didn’t *breathe* and then Draco slumped forward, cradling his head in his hands.

“They... they got out?” he glanced up at her, eyes shining.

Hermione nodded.

“Oh thank Salazar!” He exhaled deeply, forcing all the air from his lungs. “Oh fuck... they... they got out.”

Hermione watched him. He was relieved, elated, almost at this. The man had to spend almost a month in St. Mungo’s due to the injuries he received, but they said it had stopped right at the point of no return. He would have nerve damage and memory issues, but he would be able to return to his life.

She gave him a few minutes to absorb this as he clearly needed it. Draco sat there, eyes wide and staring without seeing. His chest rose and fell quickly and he ran his hand through his white blond hair only to drag it down the side of his face before it fell into his lap.

“You’re sure?” he asked suddenly, turning back to her.

Hermione nodded again. “Yes. I’ve been keeping up with all the attacks and disappearances. Neville too. You can ask him if you don’t believe me, but I remember that

one because they said it was particularly—” she stopped as Draco paled. “I remember that one because it happened on Christmas.”

He carefully pulled his face back into an impassive expression and settled his body back against the shelves again.

“I’m glad to hear they... recovered.”

“I’m glad you feel that way.”

Draco looked back at her with that unreadable expression, except... she thought she saw something deep behind the hazy grey of his eyes. Something... soft. Happy.

Oh, Draco. She wanted to reach out for him then, but couldn’t bring herself to. He didn’t want to be a Death Eater, he never had. He didn’t want to kill anyone and was thrilled when he found out he hadn’t already. Draco wasn’t the villain she had tried to paint him as since she’d seen his mark, he was... he was *her* Draco.

She should have kept asking questions about Voldemort and the Death Eaters, but the Veritaserum would be wearing off soon and... she had to know some things for herself too.

“Why did you start this?”

Draco’s brows pulled together.

“With me,” she clarified. “I know you said you had... thoughts about me, but you had taken your mark, why would you try and act on those thoughts?”

“That’s exactly why,” Draco said. “I had taken the mark. I thought I’d be out of here by the holidays. When I came across you that night well...” He shrugged. “I figured might as well.”

“Might as well?” Hermione asked, a little offended.

“If you turned me down I was no worse off than I was and if you were interested... well...” He smirked.

“Well what?” she snapped.

“Well then I’d get to fuck that sweet pussy of yours. And fuck... It is *sweet*.”

“I told you to watch your mouth,” she snapped, trying her hardest not to blush or feel the heat pooling below her navel.

“Blame the Veritaserum. I’m not really in control of what I’m saying right now, if you haven’t noticed.”

“So you would have sat here and lied to me then.” Every time she felt like she was getting somewhere...

Draco looked at her a little sadly, like he was almost disappointed. “I would have told you what you wanted to hear.”

But he had. He had said he didn’t want to be a Death Eater, that he didn’t want to kill anyone, that he had only done those things to save his family.

“Just like I always have,” he admitted. “You asked me if I was a Death Eater, right? And what did I say?”

Hermione blinked. “You... you didn’t say anything. You stormed off. And I... I felt *bad* for asking you because it clearly bothered you so much.”

“And then?” He raised his brow again.

“And then I apologized and...” Hermione’s heart clenched.

“And you let me fuck you. Right here.” Draco’s eyes heated into a smoky grey.

Hermione turned her face away from him and took a moment for herself now. She had felt guilty asking him that question, doing it more to prove herself right over Harry than anything to do with him. And he had such an adverse reaction to it that it *had* changed the way she saw him. A little. It made him more... human. He had seemed repulsed by it and it made her think maybe he was something a little *more* than the Purist ass she had always known him to be.

But had he really... no. He hadn’t tricked her into anything. It wasn’t like she didn’t want him and after she hadn’t felt guilty, she had been... happy. She liked it. She had wanted to do that. With him. And that’s why she had kept doing it, kept going back to him. She had felt guilty about lying to her friends, but never about what she did with Draco. Not until now.

“When did you start having feelings for me?”

“When you blew me in that closet.” Draco’s eyes went wide. “Oh fuck.”

Hermione’s expression mirrored his. “That was... Godric, that was back in February! Are you sure?”

“Fuck, Granger, don’t make me say it again,” Draco groaned. “It’s embarrassing.”

Hermione felt a small tug at her lips. “It’s sweet.” Oh no... what was she doing? *She* hadn’t taken a truth potion; she shouldn’t be saying things like that.

Draco looked at her intently and she saw a mischievous glint in his eye. “You think I’m sweet?”

Hermione blushed and looked down at her lap, letting her thick curls fall around her face as a curtain.

“Spread your thighs a little wider and I’ll show you how sweet I can be. I’ll even let you lick it off my lips when I’m done.”

Oh dear Godric!

“Draco, stop,” she ordered. She couldn’t sit here and listen to him say things like that to her. She couldn’t let him make her feel things like that. Not anymore. Draco let out a breath and dropped his head a little.

“There’s a few things I need to know.” The Veritaserum would start losing its potency and she wanted to be done with this before then. She didn’t trust Draco not to spin this and start to weave his web of lies around her again.

“Ask me, Sweetheart.”

“What did you do to Cormac?”

“I hit him. I broke his hand. I had Crabbe and Goyle beat the shit out of him.”

She knew it; she had just wanted him to own up to it.

It didn’t make it any easier.

“Were you trying to kill Harry in Myrtle’s bathroom?”

“No I’m better with the Cruciatus than I am the Killing Curse so I tried to throw that one instead.”

Torture Harry. He had tried to torture Harry. Like he had the Muggle. But he felt bad about that... so why had he tried to do it again?

“Why?”

“I thought you sent him after me. I wanted to send him back a little worse for wear.”

Okay, maybe she didn’t want these answers.

“Are you still going to try and kill Dumbledore?”

“I—” he stopped and looked like he was choking a little. He opened his mouth, but nothing passed through. “I don’t know.”

He had to tell the truth, but this wasn’t an answer. Or maybe it just wasn’t the one she wanted him to give. Hermione sat for a moment, going over this before she picked her next question. He was doing this to save his father and his mother. What lengths would she go to protect her own parents? If it came to it, would she do terrible things as well to keep them safe?

Draco cleared his throat loudly. Hermione remembered Slughorn’s lesson on Veritaserum earlier this year and recognized it as one of the signs of the potion losing its effects. She didn’t have much time left. Time for the lightning round.

“What do you know about the Gaunt family?”

“Old Purebloods. Died out a generation or so ago.”

“Ever heard of the name of Prince?”

“No.”

“Can I have your copy of ‘*The Sacred Twenty-Eight*’ to look in?”

“No.”

Fiddlesticks. Hermione paused, thinking hard about what she wanted to ask while she still could.

“What are the Death Eaters planning on doing next?”

“Once Dumbledore’s dead we’re going after the Ministry.”

We. Not they. We.

"It's coming, Granger. The war is coming."

Hermione looked up at him with fearful eyes. *Harry*. So soon then... she thought they'd have more time. Time to research and plan. Time to find horcruxes.

Time to change his mind.

"Do you still believe Purebloods are better than Muggleborns?"

"Yes." Draco cringed.

"Is that a lie?"

"No," he snarled.

"Why?"

"It's in our blood. You might not be as..." he struggled to say the right word. "Low as I once thought, but I have centuries of breeding in my blood that's made me who I am today. I'm not some lucky coincidence."

Hermione felt his words like a slap. It wasn't luck that she was a witch; she was born this way. It was in her blood the same as him. It was who she was.

"And you think you were *bred*? How do you explain Squibs then?"

"Flukes. Like you. Fuck!" Draco bit his tongue. He actually held it in between his teeth and clamped down to stop it.

"I'm a fluke? So I should have been a Muggle like my parents."

"Hell no."

Hermione gasped and Draco coughed hard.

"So I should be a witch? Should be magical? Sounds like you're confused."

"You think?" he growled, clearly annoyed.

"What are you confused about?"

"You."

"What about me?"

"Everything."

"That's not giving me much."

"Yes it is," Draco said seriously.

The Veritaserum must have started to wear off. He was still telling the truth, but only bits of it. The compulsion to speak was fading and soon so would the truth and she would only be left with Draco and his lies.

"How can you still believe in things like blood purity? You see the rules don't make sense! How can you still adhere to those values? Want to live in that world?" Her voice rose with each question.

"I have to. It's the only one I have." Draco leaned forward again. "It's the world I was born into, the world I was born *for*. If I don't have that... I might as well pitch myself off of the Astronomy tower."

"No, you don't! Draco, don't you see? You don't have to live like that. You don't have to follow in your father's footsteps. You can choose your own path! You can *change*."

Draco glared at her and then at the floor as if he wasn't sure what or who he was angry at. "There's only one way to stop being a Death Eater," he said darkly.

"Snape did it."

His eyes shot back up to hers. "That's a lie."

Hermione inched forward. "No, it's not. Snape... is part of the Order."

Draco laughed. He laughed right in her face. "You know, you really are just so fucking adorable, Granger."

Hermione lifted her chin. "I'm right too."

His laughter died out and was replaced by a wary look in his eyes. "Snape is a Death Eater and loyal to the Dark Lord."

Slughorn had said that people could give false information while under the influence of Veritaserum if *they* believed what they were saying to be true. Draco cleared his throat again.

"Do you care that I'm a Muggleborn?"

Draco clenched his jaw. "No."

Her heart was going to beat out of her chest. Was this real? Was this possible?

"Are you still going to try and erase my memory?"

"No. I'd like to, but no."

Well, that was something. He had the thoughts, the urges, but he was holding himself back. Once again, Draco didn't *want* to do these things, he only did them when he felt... pushed to. He had only attacked Harry because he thought Harry was there to attack him. He only tried to erase her memories because he thought it was the only way to get her back.

It still didn't make those actions right though.

Draco stared right at her as she let her thoughts fade. "I'd like to tie you back up, take you with me, and then take sweet my time on you. Oh, Granger, the things I could do to you..."

"I told you to stop saying things like that!" She knew he was trying to distract her. Draco had actually been in class the day of Slughorn's lecture and she was sure he could recognize the signs.

"Why?" He leaned forward. "Because you don't like it? Or because you like it too much?"

"I don't have to answer *your* questions," she snapped.

"Then ask me yours. Ask me how hard I got the first time I went down on you. Ask me how many times a day I think about fucking your mouth. Ask me how it felt when I came in

your tight little—”

“Stop talking or I will *make* you stop.” Hermione’s vinewood wand was pointed right at his smirking mouth and a single spark flew out of it as his tongue darted out to lick his lips. “You can’t say things like that to me anymore!”

Draco tilted his head. “Why not, Sweetheart?”

Because I still love you.

“Because I’m not your girl anymore.” Hermione’s voice shook. “And I never was, not really.”

Draco’s face fell.

“You’re a Death Eater. And I’m a...” she trailed off. It was all lies. It had to be. Because if she started to let herself think parts of it were true then...

“Please don’t say that.” His voice was soft. Weak. So unlike him yet at the same time, undeniably his.

Hermione’s eyes were large as she stared at the pained expression on his face. Her mouth parted and there were a thousand things she wanted to say to him right now, but all that came out was, “It’s true.”

“I told you not to *fucking* SAY SHIT LIKE THAT!” he roared, jerking forward.

Hermione jumped back, hitting the shelves behind her again. She lifted her wand and saw that he had done the same. The pain and anger storming in his eyes like a hurricane.

“You’re mine,” he growled and slowly lowered his wand back down.

“You don’t get to just decide that—”

“And you don’t get to just end it,” he snarled.

Hermione kept her wand on him. “I didn’t. You did.”

The pain won out and Draco slumped back, letting his chin hit his chest. He took a few shaky breaths and then asked, “If I would have told you back when you asked me, would you be with me now?”

“I guess we’ll never know.”

Draco’s lips thinned. “Yeah, we do. You’d have never given me a second chance if you knew what was on my arm.”

Hermione looked up at him. “You don’t know that.”

“Well you aren’t now,” he said wryly.

She wasn’t sure why, but Hermione asked, “Should I?”

Draco looked at her like she was the most interesting thing on earth. Then he closed his eyes, shutting her out.

“No.”

How many times was he going to break her heart? Hermione felt the pain stab into her. Once more.

“Do you love me?”

His eyes flew open and his lips parted. Hermione’s breath hitched in her throat. Draco snapped his mouth shut. Hard.

“Draco?”

“That’s cheating.”

“You broke into my mind. Let’s call it even.”

He groaned, pinching his lips together tightly.

“Do you love me?” she repeated.

“Granger—” He glared at her.

“Malfoy.” She glared back.

“Please... don’t make me say it. Not... now.”

Hermione sat stunned for a moment as he physically struggled to try and stop himself from speaking. Did he not want to admit it? Or... did he not and know that once he told her it would put an end to all of this?

But it was already at an end. Wasn’t it?

Oh dear...

Draco was breathing hard through gritted teeth. He was right. Whatever the answer was, she shouldn’t make him admit it under the influence of Veritaserum. Hermione took pity on him and asked him a different question.

“Okay, fine Draco.” He stared right at her, barely containing himself. “What... color are my eyes?”

There. That was easy enough.

Draco lunged himself at her, toppling her over before she had a chance to even breathe. He ran his fingers up into her hair and pressed himself hard against her.

“Brown. Brown like a doe’s when you blink and they go big. Brown like melted chocolate when it’s late and you’re standing in candlelight. Brown like spiced cinnamon when you get that sweet little smile and laugh. Brown, Granger, brown.”

He breathed out heavily in relief and pressed his forehead against hers.

Hermione was shocked and stunned. She hadn’t been expecting that. She hadn’t been expecting her body to soften under his, or her hands to come to rest on his sides, or her lips to part or her heart to surge upwards, so big and full and—

Draco rubbed his thumb over her cheek a few times, catching his breath. She sat there, under him. Loving him. *Draco...*

Then he filled his chest and spoke. "I love you, Hermione Granger."

Her heart stopped beating. Or maybe it just finally filled to its bursting point and exploded.

"Please... give me a chance. I... I can keep you safe. With me."

No, her heart hadn't exploded because it was currently imploding, collapsing in and sucking her soul down with it.

Be with him? A Death Eater? And what about Harry and Ron? They were her *best friends*. She couldn't leave them behind to fight the war on their own. How was Harry going to find all the horcruxes on his own? They *needed* her and she... she needed them too. The three of them had been through so much together, how could she leave that all behind?

And for Draco? He felt remorse for the things he had done, but he had still done them. And he was planning on continuing. He had no desire to defect or change. He wanted her to give in to him. He had still lied to her even if it had been one of omission. He had plotted to kill Dumbledore. He had given Katie the necklace knowing it was lethal. He had Cormac beaten on his command after he had taken his own pound of flesh. He had almost killed Ron and tried to torture Harry.

It was wrong. So why did she feel so bad about this? Harry and Ron meant more to her than she could express. They were like brothers to her. And soon Harry was going to have to go up against Voldemort and she wanted to be at his side when he did. That was important to her too.

But so was Draco. On an individual basis alone, she wasn't sure if there was a single person *more* important to her. But ideas, beliefs, ideologies... those were important too. She wanted to fight in the war and fight for what she believed in. And she wanted to do it at Harry and Ron's sides. She couldn't give that up to stand at the side of a Death Eater.

Her voice was full of every emotion she was feeling. "I— I don't—"

"Yes you do," Draco's voice was soft but strong. Desperate. "I know you do. Sweetheart. *My heart.*"

Hermione bit her lip to stop it trembling. "I don't want someone like you to love me."

He recoiled from her so quickly it took her a second to even realize he was gone. By the time she had pushed herself up he was already scrambling to his feet, pale face tight.

"You bitch."

She hardened her eyes on him and kept her wand trained in his direction. Everything about him had changed in a second; his stance, his expression, his eyes.

"I fucking bore my heart to you and you just throw it back?!"

Her own heart was tearing, ripping, crumbling. She didn't mean it, but she did! She couldn't make sense of any of this. He was Draco. He was Malfoy. She was Granger. She was Hermione. They were... they were... They were this. They had always been this. Burning. Freezing. Fucking. Fighting. Breaking. Building. It had all been building and for so long she wasn't sure what it was building to. It was this. It had been building to this.

“What do you expect me to do? Turn my back on everything else and be with you? *Knowing* what you are?”

“I fucking did.” Draco towered over her, brows pulled together trying to hide the hurt in his eyes.

“Draco,” her voice filled with all the emotions swirling around inside her.

“Fuck you.”

Hermione pushed herself up.

“Draco—”

“I guess we finally found out what you really are, *Hermione*,” he spat her name out like it was rotten. “Nothing but a Mudblood whore who likes sucking Pureblood cock.”

He took his time on each word, driving them into her very soul. Hermione’s whole body sagged. He hadn’t turned his back on anything. Anything but her.

Her Gryffindor pride roared in her chest, wounded and stumbling, but still there. She raised up her courage and her wand.

“Get out.”

Draco glared at her.

“Get out,” she repeated. “Of my Library, of my life, of *everything*.”

He leaned in slightly, eyes cold and hard like iron. “Gladly. Fucking used you up anyways.”

Her spine was shaking, but her hand was not as she sent a red-hot stream of light at him, hitting him square in the chest and knocking him back a few feet.

Draco doubled over, gasping and clutching at his chest.

“Come near me again and I’ll send the next one at your groin.”

Draco pulled himself back up to his full height. She could tell he was trying to mask his emotions, but his jaw was clenched and his nostrils flared and his eyes were so full of rage and... agony. Smoking, storming, and staring right at her. A pale blue light fell over him from a floating candle, lighting up a circle in his silver blonde hair. She might have thought it was a halo, if she didn’t know him for the devil he truly was.

“How many times do I have to tell you? This isn’t over until *I* say so.”

Something cold and solid ran down her spine, stiffening it. His gaze was so intense she could barely hold it but she didn’t have the strength to pull away either. Then it was gone. All she could see was his black clad back and two seconds later even that was gone. Hermione stayed there, pinned to the shelves, barely breathing. Just like she had been on that night so very long ago. She brought her hand up to cover her mouth, trying to keep the sob that was shaking in her chest in.

And now she did know what she was. She knew it with every fiber of her being. She was in love with him. Despite everything. And that fact broke her heart more than any of the

terrible things he'd ever said to her. She was his. She would always be his.

24. twenty four

Chapter 24

Hermione was furious. Furious with him, with herself, and with pretty much everything right now. He had turned into the cruel purist that he had always been as soon as she had... as soon as she had said that she didn't want someone like him to love her. It had been harsh, but it was how she had felt! But she hadn't meant him, *Draco*, she had meant a Death Eater.

But wasn't that what he was? He called Voldemort his Master and he told her his plan to serve him once he accomplished his task here. The murder.

The murder he didn't want to do though! The murder he had been putting off so that he would have more time to talk to her and try and fix things between them because he... because he... And now it was all more convoluted than it ever had been before.

She leaned back in her seat, breathing deeply. So this is where they were now. Separate and alone but still bound to each other by the dark secret they shared. And the love. She couldn't forget about the love.

She couldn't forget about the love.

The lies, the hurt, the hate, it all buzzed in her mind like a swarm of angry insects, but then she'd remember the cool feeling of his hands in her hair, the crisp mint of his lips, his tongue, the misty grey of his eyes as they pulled tight when he slid himself inside of her.

Oh goodness. Hermione felt her heat rush through her and pool between her legs. She crossed them quickly and shifted in her seat a little. She shouldn't think about Draco like that anymore.

She shouldn't think about the lightning strikes in his stormy eyes when he got excited or his deep chuckle that reverberated in her ears or how he looked so cute and almost bashful when he *smiled*.

Hermione took a deep breath in through her nose and dipped her quill back in her inkwell before bending down to finish her Arithmancy homework. Tomorrow was the last day of classes before their exams and then after that it would be the end of the term and she could leave and go home and—

And sit in her room and think about him all summer. Wonder what he was doing and if he was okay. Worry that he would be forced to commit acts like the one he had over Christmas. Would he be thinking of her? Would he miss her?

Probably not. She wasn't anything but a Mudblood whore to him right? No. Hermione sighed and paused, forgetting the premise of the paragraph she was on. She had thought over everything he said that night and again and again came to the conclusion that he had done what he always did and strike out at her when he felt wounded.

She had said something harsh to him and so he had said something harsher. But she hadn't meant she didn't want *him* to love her, she just didn't want a Death Eater to. Because she didn't want to love a Death Eater back. But she did. Godric help her, but she did.

Part of her wanted to go and find him, tell them exactly that and somehow it would all work out, right? But this wasn't a fairy tale and the only kind of prince Draco was, was a Slytherin Prince. He certainly hadn't wasted anytime taking that mantle up again either. He played his part this morning in Transfiguration well enough.

"Pansy!" Draco said, sounding impressed as Hermione sat herself down next to Harry before McGonagall arrived, pushing her curly hair out of her face. She was bending down, pulling her book from her bag when she heard his voice and looked back over her shoulder to see Pansy walking in front of Draco's desk in the back of the class.

"Damn, you look good today."

Pansy laughed her bark-like laugh and shook her short black hair, swaying her hips as she passed in front of him.

"Oh no you don't," Draco snaked out an arm and grabbed her wrist, pulling her towards him. "I've got a seat for you right here." He pulled her down onto his lap.

Pansy gave a small squeal and wiggled a little on him, crossing her legs so her skirt rode up on her thigh.

Hermione felt sick watching them. Draco's grey eyes gleamed as he slid his hands over Pansy's waist. He snapped his jaws at her playfully and Pansy fell into a fit of giggles, pushing against his chest as he growled and pulled her back to him. Hermione could feel her face pulling in distaste. It was disgusting what he was doing and it was even more disgusting that it was *working*.

She wanted to march over there and yank Pansy off of him by her short black hair and *slap* Draco before grabbing his tie and haul him up to her and show Pansy what he *really* looked like when he was turned on. Burning cold flames licked her insides and she felt one of her eyes twitching.

Draco pulled his bottom lip into his mouth, smirking smugly as Pansy ran her hands up around the back of his neck and played with his hair a little. She knew Draco loved that and this was his reminder that Pansy knew it too.

She wanted to vomit.

And that's what he wanted. Well, maybe not to make her spill her breakfast, but to get on her nerves at least. He was trying to make her jealous, trying to make her feel something. It was juvenile, but effective. But she didn't have to let him know that. Hermione turned back around where Ron was turned around in his seat and looking at her with a troubled expression on his face.

"Are you okay? You look upset."

"I'm fine, Ronald!" she snapped and *hoped* that Draco hadn't heard her. 'I... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you,' she said in a softer voice as Ron pulled back from her. "I'm just

nervous about exams and I want McGonagall to her here so we can start to cover everything we need to before—”

“What the fuck are you doing?!”

Hermione spun back around to see Nott standing next to Draco who still had Pansy on his lap.

“Oh, playtime’s over.” Draco grinned at Pansy and patted her ass right before Nott grabbed Pansy’s arm and hauled her up from Draco’s lap.

“Ow, Theo, that hurts!” she whined, but Nott didn’t let go.

“I was just keeping her warm for you, Theo.” Draco smirked and leaned back, stretching out his legs.

“Pansy is *my* girlfriend. Where’s yours? Or did you get dumped again?”

A few students made low noises of surprise and shock and Hermione felt heat rush up into her face furiously.

Draco stood up slowly and Nott pulled Pansy a little farther away from him. Hermione saw his fingers twitch at his side and knew he was seconds away from either cursing Nott or hitting him.

“Why have my own when I can have yours any time I want? Isn’t that right Pansy?” Draco tilted his head and smirked at her.

“Draco, don’t...” Pansy said in a strained voice and tried to pull at Nott’s hand still wrapped tightly around her arm.

“See? She doesn’t want you,” Nott snarled.

Draco leaned forward. “You sure about that?”

Theo glared back at him and then pulled Pansy away to another desk. Pansy whimpered a little and rubbed her wrist as he threw her down in a chair, glancing back and forth between the two Slytherins.

Hermione’s body felt numb and she knew she was staring, but at least she wasn’t the only one this time. Almost everyone was watching Nott glower in Draco’s direction while he rolled his eyes and leaned over to whisper something low to Crabbe who chuckled darkly in response.

The rest of the class started to settle back down in the still tense atmosphere, but Hermione was not able to pull her gaze away from Draco. Her heart rate spiked as he glanced at her. His lids hung low over his eyes and she could now see purple tinged circles under them and noticed a hint of stubble along his jaw. He gave her a sneering smirk before dragging his eyes over to Theo and Pansy’s desk.

Hermione watched as his smirk turned mischievous and he threw a wink over at Pansy.

“That’s it!” Nott stood up, slamming his hands onto his desk. “You fucking come near her again and I’ll—”

“Mr. Nott!” Professor McGonagall stood in the doorway of the classroom. She was an imposing sight with her lips pursed tightly and her eyes blazing fiercely at Nott who awkwardly dropped back into his seat.

McGonagall took a moment to look around at the rest of the class who scrambled to get into their seats, pulling out quills, books, and notebooks.

Professor McGonagall stiffly yet quickly made her way to the front of the classroom, flicking her wand to close the door behind her before turning to glare sharply at the Slytherins in the back of the class as if daring them to make as much as a hiss.

“She should take points,” Ron leaned back and muttered to Hermione and Harry. “Snape would do it to us.”

“Mr. Weasley—” her curt voice cut through the classroom. Ron paled and turned back to the front of the room. “I am quite capable of keeping order in my own classroom without your comments!”

“Yes ma’am,” Ron gulped and Hermione saw the back of his neck and ears turn as red as his hair.

Draco snorted loudly and Hermione’s head whipped back around, glaring at him just as harshly as she knew Professor McGonagall was.

“Sorry, Professor,” Draco said smoothly. “I’ve been unwell.”

He fake coughed loudly into his fist. She had to admit he didn’t look well, but she didn’t believe it was because he had been sick for a minute.

“Do you need to see Madame Pomfrey?” Professor McGonagall asked sharply.

“No need,” he said and his eyes met Hermione’s again. “I’m getting better.”

What he had meant by that she wasn’t sure. She also didn’t understand why he had said this wasn’t over when he clearly was ready to move on. But Hermione wasn’t asking him. In fact, she had ignored him completely for the rest of the day and well into the evening until she had fallen back into her deep thoughts of him.

Hermione set her quill down and looked over her Arithmany work before sighing and rolling it up. It was late and she was exhausted. Her mind had not stopped spinning, going over and over everything that Draco had said to her.

Lavender and Parvati were already asleep when she got upstairs and she quietly dressed for bed. It felt unseasonably cool in the dorm tonight and Hermione thought about casting a warming charm on her sheets before realizing she was just too tired to do anything else tonight. Maybe Crookshanks could snuggle and keep her warm.

She sunk down into the soft bed, wishing her brain to slow enough so that she could find some rest tonight. Images of Draco slouched on the Library floor pervaded her mind, forcing themselves forward as she closed her eyes. Of course they did. He couldn’t even give her a good night’s sleep could he? Ugh, she was so *angry* with him!

“I love you, Hermione Granger.”

Hermione sighed and curled up on her side.

I love you too, Draco.

Fuck her.

Fuck that bitch.

Fuck that god-awful dirty little Mud—

Draco took a swig from his bottle and then slammed it down on the table next to his bed. No. He had felt a bitter, sick feeling when he used it again, as if it was poison in his mouth. But her face had been worse. He had done it again. He had hurt her in the way only he could.

He was a piece of shit.

And that's why she didn't want him to love her. Granger was a smart girl, she knew exactly who and what he was. And she didn't want him anymore. He'd even tried to take Veritaserum for her and somehow he had fucked that up too. By telling her he loved her. By opening up to her and being fucking honest on his own! Fuck, he had felt the second the Veritaserum had loosened its hold on him and he had *stupidly* opened his fucking mouth again and fucking told her he loved her.

He gave her everything. Everything he had. And she didn't even fucking want it.

Draco grabbed the bottle again and quickly swallowed down a couple mouthfuls, wincing as it burned deep into him. He should have just obliterated her. He was there, right fucking there. He could have plucked that memory right from her pretty little head and then taken her against the shelves just like he had before. Fucking her tight little cunt until she was moaning, coming, and declaring *her* love for him.

But that was never going to happen. Not now. This had all ended before it even started when he lied to her about the mark. He had always known, on some level, this was only a play out of the fantasies in his head and never anything real. He had just let himself believe that it was because it felt good. One shining golden thing in his cold, dark world.

But he couldn't stop. These feelings had dug claws into him, pulled him tight, and was mercilessly holding him hostage in his own body.

He brought the bottle to his lips again, but stopped when a deep wave of guilt rolled through him. She didn't like him when he drank. She didn't like him at all now, though. Still, he set the bottle back down and laid back, staring up at the canopy above his bed. Rich thick waves of dark green moved through it interspersed with intricately woven silver threads creating a scale-like pattern. How many nights had he stared up at that and thought of her?

Draco felt himself slowly start sinking into the depths of sleep, dragged under by the fire whisky and the mental exhaustion of going over everything again and again. Every time he caught her eye in class, every time he brushed his hand through her hair, every time she had said his name.

It wasn't just her body that he missed, it was *her*. He might not know much *about* her, but he knew *who* she was. He couldn't list her favorite food or color or make her laugh about something that happened years ago because they'd been best fucking friends forever, but he knew her bravery from when she got on his broom, and her kindness from when she tried to help him when he was drunk, and he knew her goddamn goodness because she had forgiven him for every terrible thing he'd done to her.

He closed his eyes and swallowed.

Fuck, Granger, I miss you.

The silence between his ears was deafening.

"Hermione, can I talk to you for a minute?"

Hermione looked at Parvati who looked at the little door to the bathroom in their dorm that Lavender had just disappeared into.

Hermione glanced at the bathroom door and heard the shower start running and Lavender start singing.

Parvati quickly crossed over to Hermione's side of the room and stood strangely close to her. Hermione felt a little uncomfortable and tried to find any indication as to what Parvati was about to say in her deep, dark eyes.

"Are you shagging Malfoy?"

Hermione paled. "W-what?"

"You and Malfoy," Parvati said seriously. "Is there something going on between you?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Hermione said breathlessly. "Malfoy? Can you imagine?"

"Lavender can."

Hermione's heart started beating in double time and her lungs stopped working altogether. Lavender's voice echoed in from the bathroom and Hermione felt the simmering anger flare up inside her.

"I really don't care what Lavender thinks of me—"

Parvati shook her head making her long silky hair shake down her back. "You don't understand. She thinks you're the reason she and Ron broke up. Now she's trying to ruin your relationship with him because she thinks you ruined hers. It's crazy, I know but Lavender says you're always sneaking looks at each other and that he was flirting with you one time after Charms."

Hermione did not take this lightly. She had noticed Lavender watching her over the past few months, Parvati too for that matter, but the fact that Parvati was here warning her instead of plotting to out her with Lavender showed the difference in the two girls.

"Hermione, I know we've never been... close, but I don't want—" Parvati stopped talking and glanced over at the bathroom door. "She's tried to tell Ron, but he got mad at her as soon

as she mentioned Malfoy and your name in the same sentence.”

“Thank you for telling me,” Hermione managed as her mind spun faster and faster. “But there’s really nothing for Lavender to tell Ron in the first place.”

There wasn’t. Not anymore. This entire conversation was a painful reminder and one she didn’t need. In fact, Hermione wanted to be long gone by the time Lavender came out from the shower in case her anger sparked up and she clawed Lavender’s prying little eyes out of her head.

“Hermione,” Parvati gently touched her arm.

“What?” she said sharply. Was there some sort of intramural competition to see who could piss her off the most?

Parvati looked at her knowingly. “It’s just... I share a dorm with you too. I’ve heard you call his name.”

Hermione opened her mouth, but her brain failed to make up any excuse as to why she would be calling Draco’s name out in her sleep. She looked deep into Parvati’s dark eyes which were surprisingly understanding.

“It was just a dream. Nothing more.”

Dinner that evening was awkward as Hermione tried to be extra friendly so that Ron and Harry did not notice how nervous she was and so that Ron wouldn’t believe the rumors Lavender was spreading about her. Even if they were true.

But it didn’t matter because it wasn’t happening any more and it would be devastating if now, after everything, it came out that she had slept with Draco. She could imagine the looks of disappointment and anger on their faces when they found out what she had done. And if they ever found out what Draco was... Oh goodness.

“Can you pass me those rolls?” Hermione asked in a high pitched voice.

Ron handed her the tray and she smiled brightly at him, hoping he didn’t see how anxious she was. Ron didn’t seem to and returned her smile with his own.

It was easier than she thought to fall into conversation with them and started to feel a little of the tension in her shoulders fade as they talked more. Harry was worried that this would be the first year he failed Defense Against the Dark Arts because of Snape, but Hermione assured him that his skills spoke for themselves and although Snape might be biased, he had never failed Harry at Potions.

“She’s right,” Ron chimed in through a mouthful of potatoes. “Plus, Dumbledore would send him straight back to the dungeons if he tried to pull anything like that.”

“He’d have to get in line,” Ginny said under her breath and Hermione watched Harry smile down into his green beans, a red tint rising up in his cheeks.

“Thanks, Gin.” He grabbed her hand in his.

Hermione found herself smiling as she watched her two friends. She was so happy for them and it was such a long time coming, but they had finally managed to work it out and end up with each other. Sometimes it was just a matter of timing she supposed, and sometimes it was waiting on one person to realize how they really felt.

Draco had finally said that he loved her, but only after she saw the mark and only after she had ended things. Would he have said it otherwise?

Hermione sat her fork down. It didn't matter either way. What happened happened and it was useless the daydream about any other alternative.

"I don't have to meet Luna in the Library until later, want to go down to the Lake before it gets dark?" Ginny asked, squeezing Harry's hand.

Hermione felt Ron shift uncomfortably next to her and he said, "I don't know, I'm pretty tired."

Ginny glared at her brother. "You're not invited," she snapped.

Hermione stifled a laugh as she locked eyes with Harry who was doing the same thing as she was.

Ginny stood up and pulled Harry after her. He waved a quick goodbye to Ron and Hermione before hurrying to follow Ginny out of the Great Hall.

Ron shook his head, making his copper hair fall into his face a little. "She does that on purpose, you know," he said, motioning with his fork to the disappearing figures of Harry and Ginny. "She knows I'm still getting used to it, she doesn't have to rub it in my face every time she gets a chance."

Hermione laughed a little. "You're just very sensitive, Ron."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Do you ever think that maybe part of the reason you feel like this is because Harry is your best friend?"

"Well of course!"

"No, I mean, because now Harry has someone that he wants to hang out with that's not you and maybe you feel a little lonely."

Ron blinked. "Oh. I don't know, I mean, I still have you, don't I?"

His powder blue eyes were clear and open. Hermione could see exactly what he was feeling in that moment and quickly looked back down at her food.

"Yeah," she said in a softer voice. "I'm your friend too."

She could feel Ron still looking at her and poked at the last couple of green beans on her plate, pretending to decide whether to eat them or not.

"Well, since it's just the two of us tonight, what do you want to do?"

Hermione looked back up at him and bit her lip. "Maybe we should just go back to the common room, you said you were tired."

Ron had a strange look on his face that she couldn't quite place. "Yeah, but if you wanted to... walk somewhere too... we could."

Hermione took a deep breath, mouth opening slightly. The strange expression was gone and now he looked hopeful. Oh dear.

"The common room is fine."

They gathered their things and walked into the Entrance Hall, talking about their plans for the summer when Hermione saw him. His pale blond hair stood out starkly even though it was messy and a few locks fell down over his forehead. She stopped walking and watched as Draco leaned back against the wall, his tall frame slouching a little as he shoved his hands into his pockets.

"I'll be glad to see the last of him for a while," Ron leaned down to say in a low voice, nodding towards Draco.

Draco laughed loudly at something that Goyle had said and Hermione narrowed her eyes disapprovingly at him. Why was he doing this? Hanging out with his goons again and loitering, looking for trouble. Being the cruel Slytherin Prince he had been for so many years. If he thought she was just a Mudblood whore then what was he still doing here? He said he had a way to accomplish his task and *she* certainly wasn't the reason he was staying.

Or was she? Draco had always liked messing with her, making fun of her and he *had* said it wasn't over. Could it be that's why he had elected to stay, just to torture her further?

Well, she hadn't stood for that kind of behavior before and she *absolutely* wasn't going to stand for it now.

Hermione touched Ron's arm. "Me too," she said loudly and Draco's laughter died at the sound of her voice. *Good*. "I can't wait for this summer when I get to come and see you."

Ron looked a little surprised, but mostly pleased. "Yeah?" he grinned widely and Hermione nodded.

"I think I might come early, if that's okay with you? Maybe sometime in July?"

"Yeah, of course!" Ron said excitedly. "I can write to Mum when we go up and tell her you'll—"

"Aren't you two just *fucking adorable*." Draco's cold voice came from behind her and Hermione turned to see him standing a little ways off, shirt untucked and hanging loosely on him. "Oh don't stop planning your honeymoon on my account!" He mockingly held up his hands.

"Fuck off, Malfoy," Ron growled from beside her.

"Wow, Granger, you sure move on fast, don't you?" His eyes were as hard as iron and the purple circles were deeper. He must not have slept much last night.

Hermione felt her nerves light up in her fingertips.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ron took a step towards Draco.

"Nothing!" Hermione grabbed his arm, fear spiking up in her.

Crabbe and Goyle were hovering slightly behind Draco and if it came down to it, they were outnumbered. But Hermione was less worried about the damage Draco would do with his wand and more about what he could do with his mouth.

Draco sneered at the pair of them and moved a little closer. At this distance she was able to see the grey pallor of his skin and even though she didn't want to be, Hermione couldn't help but be worried about him.

"Let's just say you won't have to worry about changing the sheets after your wedding night, Weasley."

Hermione's heart stopped beating. *What was he doing?!*

Ron's face was turning a deep shade of red and she had no idea what she would do if they hit each other. Oh God. Oh God. Oh God.

"Ron, please," she pulled hard on his arm. "Let's just go. Let's go back. Together." She added the last word. For him, for herself.

Draco's cold eyes turned on her and she saw the pain cracking in the hard stone of them. Why was he doing this? Hadn't he taken enough from her already; did he really need to take Ron too?

"What's he talking about?" Ron asked seriously, bending his head low to hers.

Hermione looked away from Draco, unable to keep staring into his eyes. "Nothing," she muttered nervously and pushed her hair behind her ear. "It's nothing."

"Hermione—"

"Granger—"

Hermione looked between them and felt like she was being ripped in two. Her heart was in her throat, causing a lump that she wasn't able to swallow back down and it was pushing painful emotions up, pressing tears into the corners of her eyes and she didn't want to cry right now and especially not in front of him.

"I'll explain everything, Ronald," she said quickly. "Please, just take me back."

"Don't—" Draco's voice was softer, pleading, and Hermione looked back at him. His entire expression had changed. No longer cold and cruel, instead he looked lost and in pain. She just barely shook her head, a few curls trembling.

Draco pulled himself up to his full height and his face turned stoic as stone. "Don't you need to go plan out your next good deed? Save the Snorkacks or something?"

Hermione raised her chin and took a shaky breath, trying to pull herself together.

"At least Snorkacks can be saved," Ron retorted. "You're a lost cause, Malfoy."

Draco closed the last bit of space between them and stared dead straight into Ron's eyes.

"You don't know what I am, Weasley, but you'll find out soon enough." He raised his eyebrows quickly and Ron glowered back at him.

No... he wouldn't. Her heart sank inside her.

She pulled on Ron's hand and led him up the stairs. She could feel Draco watching her as she walked away so she focused on each marble step under her feet and not at the fact that she had left her heart at the bottom of the stairs with him.

She didn't want him anymore? Fine. *Fucking fine*. She could run off with Weasley, back to their cozy little common room and snuggle up in front of the fire with him, letting him put his lanky arm around her and touch his fucking chest while he looked down at her big doe eyes right before he tried to—

Oh *fuck* that.

Draco turned on his heel and headed back up the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Blaise asked him.

"None of your fucking business!"

He rolled his eyes as he heard Blaise rushing to catch up with him.

"You're going after her, aren't you?"

Draco ignored him.

"Don't ignore me, Draco."

He groaned and slowed, turning to face Blaise.

"Yes. I'm going after her. Because she's up there with that fucking ginger prick and she should be—"

"With you?"

"YES!"

Blaise looked at him sadly. "Mate, you've tried. She's not coming back."

Draco sighed heavily. He had tried. He had tried everything he could and it still hadn't been enough. He thought telling her how he felt would have... changed something. But it hadn't because he could love her all he wanted and it would not erase that mark from his arm.

And that's what he was to her now, a Death Eater. Just like she had been a Mudblood to him for so many years. And just because he was willing to look past her blood status didn't mean that she was willing to see past his mark.

He couldn't blame her. He hated it too.

"Come on," Blaise touched his shoulder. "We can play a game of chess—"

"I don't want to play fucking chess, Blaise!"

"Okay, okay!" Blaise tried to calm him back down as Draco ran a frustrated hand through his hair. "But you can't stay here and shout about her."

Draco leaned back against the cool stone of the castle wall and closed his eyes. He couldn't stay here and shout about her or at her or anything to her anymore. There was only

one thing he could do at this point. Draco swallowed and tried to ignore the bitter taste in his mouth.

He had spent the last six months thinking he had killed a man and only the past few days knowing that he wasn't a murderer. It was a nice reprieve, just like she had been. But reality was just as cold and hard as the wall behind him.

"I'm going to go."

"What? What do you mean 'go'?"

Draco shrugged.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Blaise snapped.

Draco focused on a chipped stone on the floor. "Thanks for everything, Blaise." He looked up into Blaise's deeply troubled eyes. "You're a good friend."

Blaise blinked and took a step back.

"Draco—"

He pushed himself up off the wall and started down the corridor.

Blaise didn't follow him and to be honest, Draco didn't expect him too. He was a good friend and he had done everything he could to help Draco get through this past year, but... the year was almost over and there was nothing left he or anyone could do.

Draco felt numb as he moved through the castle. Nothing felt real or tangible or really there. He wondered if this is what it felt like to be a ghost or if this was it was just like without Granger. Without light. Without hope.

What hope had there ever really been for him anyways?

He decided to stop by Myrtle's bathroom. Strangely enough, after Blaise, Myrtle was the closest person, well not *person*, but closest... *thing* he had to a friend.

"Draco! You're back! Oh I'm so glad you're alright, I was so worried about you!" Myrtle swooped down to hover in front of him. He gave her a flat smile and moved past her, further into the bathroom, carefully making his way around several puddles until he leaned back against the side of one of the tall green stalls.

"Hey Ghostie."

"I told *everyone* what Harry did to you," she said so emphatically that her pigtails swung back and forth. "It was awful, he almost killed you!"

Draco leaned his head back and looked at the ceiling. "I know."

"I'm so glad you're okay. I knew you'd come back. I *knew* you'd want to see me—"

"Did you?" he asked dryly. "Because I don't know why the fuck I'm here."

He had come here many times this term to... talk. And think. But he had made up his mind and had said everything he needed to already and none of it had made a difference. Nothing

ever had. It had all been leading to this; his entire life. His entire miserable life had only ever been a lead up to death death death.

So maybe that's why he was here, in the cold damp bathroom with a bloody ghost for company.

"Are you okay?" Myrtle asked softly, floating towards him.

Draco gave her a wry smile. "I'm dead. Can't you tell?"

Myrtle blinked her glazed eyes and Draco felt his stomach turn at the sight of them. Death. He was drenched in it. Drowning. And the only thing that had kept him above water was gone now. *She* was gone.

"That's not funny," Myrtle pouted. "You shouldn't joke about that. I would give *anything* to be alive again. Just for one more day. Taste food, walk on the grass, feel the sun on my face..."

Draco watched her as tears spilled down her cheeks. Ghostie was always crying over something, but he supposed, missing life was as good a reason as any. Not that his life was one to envy.

"Trade you," Draco muttered.

"You have no idea what you're saying," Myrtle said and for the first time she looked angry.

Draco was a little shocked. "Tell me then. Tell me what death feels like."

He needed to know. So he'd know what he was sending Dumbledore to or if he failed, what he'd be facing at the end of the Dark Lord's wand. He felt sick as he waited for her to answer, terrified to know the truth of it.

Myrtle appraised him for a moment. "Cold," she said softly. "It feels cold."

He could understand that. Without Granger he felt like he had swallowed a corrosive poison, turning his blood bitter inside him. She had been like daylight, streaming over him and keeping him warm. He had cursed the way she scorched him, but now, like Myrtle, he would give anything to have it back. Just once.

"Does it hurt?" His voice was soft. There was a good chance that he wasn't going to make it much longer. If he didn't kill Dumbledore the Dark Lord would surely kill him and even if he tried to kill Dumbledore, he might die in the process. His father had always said Dumbledore was a demented old fool, but something in his twinkling blue eyes made Draco think he wouldn't go down without a fight.

Myrtle didn't say anything for a long while then softly said, "It was so long ago, I... I don't remember."

Hermione twisted her fingers in front of her. She had gone over this in her head more times than she could count and still had come to zero conclusions about what to do. Since she

couldn't figure out the *correct* answer, she did the next best thing and landed on what she thought was the *right* answer.

Or most right.

Maybe right.

Not *wrong*, at least.

"Professor McGonagall?" she said breathlessly as the older witch ushered some third years serving detention out of her classroom. Professor McGonagall blinked in surprise to see Hermione standing in the hallway, bouncing up and down nervously on her feet.

"Miss Granger," she looked Hermione over, as if she was making sure she was in one piece.

Hermione took a quick step forward and glanced down the hall. "Professor, I need to speak with the Headmaster. It's imperative—"

McGonagall held up her hand as the last student hurried past and Hermione paused until the boy was well down the hall to salvage what he could of the evening.

"What is this about?" she asked.

Hermione checked around once more. She didn't think Draco would appear, but that seemed to be exactly when he did, like earlier in the Entrance Hall. She had to pull Ron all the way up to Gryffindor Tower and then up into his dorm where they were less likely to be interrupted before trying to explain Draco's accusations. She ignored Lavender's deep glare as Ron ran up the stairs with her. She'd deal with her later.

Hermione didn't want to lie to Ron, but Draco hadn't left her any choice. She supposed he had done that on purpose though.

She spun around as soon as the door closed behind Ron and said, "He knows about... my someone." It was the best thing she could come up with on what felt like both the shortest and the longest walk back to the common room. "He— he caught me."

Goodness, had he ever. He had caught her completely and she didn't think he had any intention of letting her go. At least not until he was done breaking her heart into as many little pieces as possible and ruining every other relationship in her life.

Ron gaped at her, clear blue eyes wide. Hermione cringed having to tell him even this much. She couldn't imagine what it would be like if she had to tell him that her someone was actually Draco.

"Oh."

"Ron, it wasn't—"

"I just—" He looked down at the floor between them. "I mean, I wondered if you... when Lavender said you were out that night, but when you said it wasn't serious... I didn't—" He took a deep breath and looked a little confused. "I didn't think you'd really..."

Hermione felt the creature inside her sit up and flex its claws. "Didn't think I'd what, Ron?"

He frowned. "I thought you'd wait."

She blinked a few times in surprise. "Wait?"

Ron's expression turned darker, brow hanging low. "For me."

Her brows shot up her forehead. "For you? You thought I'd just wait until you were what? *Done* with Lavender so I could have my turn?"

Face reddening, Ron shouted, "I didn't think you'd fuck some guy you didn't even really like and let Malfoy watch!"

Hermione wanted to slap him. She wanted to hex him. She wanted to storm out of here and *never* speak to him again. How *dare* he say those things to her?! He was supposed to be her friend!

"Is that why he's always staring at you? Trying to catch the next show?"

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest where her lion's pride was roaring with fury. "That is not *at all* what happened! I can't *believe* you right now!"

"Same here!" He threw his hands up. Ron's ears had turned violently red and he was breathing heavily. Why was *he* mad at *her*?

"I really don't care *what* you have to say about my private life so I think it would be best if we didn't talk about it. Or anything right now for that matter." She was *done* with this.

"Are you really going to leave right now? Going to go back to the guy you won't even tell me his name?" Ron accused.

"If I am," she matched his tone and his gaze. "It's not your concern, Ronald. I am not your girlfriend, I am not your *anything*. And I never was."

That was true. She didn't know what she was to Draco exactly, but she had *never* been Ron's.

"Don't go," Ron said quickly as she moved towards the door.

"Why not?" Hermione rounded on him, hazelnut curls fanning out around her.

"Because—" Ron pinched his lips together. "Because *I* don't want you to."

"Well that's too bad because *I'd* rather face off with Draco again instead of stay here with you!"

Hermione pulled the door open and Ron slammed his hand into it, closing it back. She looked up at him and exhaled sharply. "What do you think you're—"

"That's the second time you've called him Draco."

Hermione blanched. Her voice was soft and breathy as she tried to play it off. "What? That's his name—"

"You never called him Draco before."

"I've never called you Weasley before either, but if you don't let go of this door, by Godric, I *will*."

Ron held her gaze, but Hermione refused to be the one to break it. She held her ground and the doorknob. The red in Ron's face drained a little and he dropped his hand from the door.

"Hermione, I didn't mean—"

She wrenched the door open and slipped outside, closing it sharply behind her before he could say another word. Hermione tore down the stairs and back into the common room, still ignoring Lavender and her now smug look and headed to the east wing of the castle, long rays from the burning sunset behind her.

It had been what Ron said that made her do this, not about her, but about Draco; that he was a lost cause. He... wasn't. He had only ever done those bad things because he felt like he didn't have any other options. Despite his threats, she knew he didn't really want to kill Dumbledore, but without an alternative, would he try?

Either way, she couldn't stay in the common room without attacking Lavender and didn't want to sit alone in her dorm anymore so she held her head high and let her twisting curls fall back over her shoulders with each step until she arrived at Professor McGonagall's door.

"Please, Professor, can you take me to him? I can explain everything once we are there," Hermione said urgently.

Professor McGonagall eyed her carefully. "Is this about Potter?"

"No," Hermione said quickly. "It's about—" she let out a sharp breath. "Please, Professor, someone could get hurt."

McGonagall straightened her neck and her thin frame tensed. "Very well."

Hermione could have hugged her in that moment. She was going to get to talk with Dumbledore and tell him— well... not everything, but enough. Enough to try and stop him. Enough to try and help him.

Professor McGonagall led her through the corridors and up several flights of stairs. Hermione's legs were shaking, but they carried her there all the same. She glanced around every few seconds, expecting to see storming eyes, but there was no sign of him. Maybe that in itself was an omen, but not good or evil, she wasn't sure.

Hermione tried to push him from her mind. She needed to focus and stick to her resolve. And she needed to *not* let herself start sounding like Professor Trelawney with her predictions of doom and despair either.

She couldn't help but feel the tinge of hurt and disappointment by what Ron had said to her tonight. They had been doing so well, better than ever really and now... This was all Draco's fault. Why couldn't he have just stayed on his side of the Entrance Hall getting drunk with his friends like he seemed perfectly happy to?

"Well, I'm glad to cause discord between you and Weasley."

"Why's that?"

"Because he wants to fuck you."

Is that why he had said those things in front of Ron? Was he making sure that if he couldn't have her, no one else would either?

"Tell. Him."

"Are you out of your mind?!"

"That prick is trying to fuck my girl."

*"Well your **girl** isn't fucking anyone but you so you don't need to worry about that."*

It was as true now as it was then. She had said she wasn't his girl anymore but... she was. And she couldn't picture a time where she would want to be with someone else. She knew she was young and he was her first, but she didn't want him to just be her first, she wanted him to be her *forever*.

Hermione shook her head. But his forever was branded onto his arm and he had no place for her in it. Draco had made his choice and now she was making hers.

Professor McGonagall stopped in front of the large statue of a griffin and stood up straight as she said, "Toffee Éclairs."

The griffin started to move and McGonagall led her up the winding staircase and knocked on the door at the top before a deep, melodious voice from inside called out, "Enter."

Hermione followed her Professor McGonagall in and Dumbledore was already on his feet, walking around his desk to greet them. She glanced around, never having been here herself before and was vastly intrigued by the cabinets and tables full of magical items and objects that at any other time she would have been thrilled to explore and ask questions about, but right now all she wanted to do was get this over with.

"Miss Granger," Dumbledore's warm tone extended. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Professor, thank you for seeing me," she started and Dumbledore gave her a patient smile. He must have been used to students nervously addressing him and people fawning over him. Now that she was here, her stomach was in knots and she found it hard to say what she came to.

"All my students are welcome to drop in for a visit and a cup of tea, somehow they never seem to." Dumbledore had such a strange way of being calm and collected during the most intense situations. Hermione wished she could keep that much composure, but her mind always seemed to race too far ahead to be considered *calm*.

Both Dumbledore and McGonagall were watching her and Hermione realized she hadn't said anything in quite some time. "That must be very lonely for you."

She cringed. What was she doing?! She had come here for a reason, a very important reason, and now she was talking about... tea? And commenting on Professor Dumbledore's social life? Good Godric.

He took pity on her. "How may I help you, Miss Granger?"

Well that really was the question of the hour, wasn't it?

She had waited so long to come here and now that she was, she was finding it hard to say the actual words. Why? Because she was still waiting. Waiting on Draco. He had always come back and smoothly talked her into his arms again. He had always known what to say to make everything alright and she, like a *fool*, had been waiting on him to do it again.

She took a short breath and looked to Professor McGonagall before turning back; meeting Dumbledore's blue eyes and finally doing what she should have done all along.

"Professor I need to talk to you about Draco Malfoy."

"Oh?"

"Yes sir. I... I have reason to believe that he is a Death Eater."

McGonagall inhaled sharply and then in a fierce voice said, "Miss Granger, as you are aware Mr. Potter has already brought this subject to both mine and Professor Dumbledore's attention—"

Hermione opened her mouth to answer, but Dumbledore beat her to it. "Minerva, would you mind terribly giving Miss Granger and I a moment?"

Professor McGonagall looked a little surprised that she was being asked to leave, but then graciously inclined her head and took her leave.

The door closed behind her and Hermione felt the full weight of Dumbledore's attention on her. "Would you like to sit down, Miss Granger?"

He led her a little further in and up on a dais where his desk sat, motioning to one of the chairs on the opposite side of it. It was then that she caught her first glimpse at his hand. Harry had told her about it, but she hadn't really seen it up close before now. Blackened and withered, Hermione knew enough about curses to know that was a serious one. Dumbledore noticed her staring and tucked it back into his sleeve.

Hermione gently sat down, folding her hands in her lap only to unfold them and pick at her fingers. Dumbledore made himself comfortable in his own chair, settling in with a deep sigh.

"Would you care for a Pepper Imp?" he offered.

"No thank you."

"Licorice Snap?"

"No sir."

"Toffee?"

"Sir—"

"Do you mind if I..." Dumbledore started to unwrap a toffee loudly.

Hermione decided to wait until he had finished. The Headmaster popped the candy in his mouth, rolled it around a few times, and folded the wrapper up into a small, flat square. She felt awkward enough already and something in Dumbledore's easy manner in conjunction with his quick dismissal of McGonagall made her feel even more nervous.

"Now," he said with a smile. "You believe that Draco Malfoy has taken the dark mark and pledged his life to Lord Voldemort?" He made it sound like Draco had just picked out a new hat.

"Yes sir."

"As Professor McGonagall said, Harry has discussed his concerns on this with me already as I am sure he has you. I am afraid that I must give you the same answer."

It was now or never and how she wished that it had *never* come to this.

"I saw it. I saw the mark on him."

Her blood was rushing in her veins and her hands were shaking in her lap, but Dumbledore sat across the desk from her, just as calm as he had all evening. How was that possible when she *just* told him— Oh... *he knew*.

"Professor—"

"Have you told Harry what you have told me?"

"No sir."

"Anyone?"

"No sir."

"Good." He pressed his fingers together, the contrast between his healthy hand and his cursed hand was more apparent than ever. "I must ask you to keep this information to yourself."

"But Professor—"

"Miss Granger, please," he sounded... tired. Like an old man who had seen too much. "I am asking you, do not speak of Draco's predicament to anyone. Harry most of all."

What? Out of all the ways she had envisioned this going, this outcome had never been one she imagined.

"This is a delicate situation, one that is being handled, I can assure you."

Handled?

"...hand me over to Dumbledore and his lot and let them torture it out of me."

"You must not know much about your precious Order then, Granger."

"Please don't hurt him." The words came tumbling out before she could stop them. Because as much as she wanted to, she couldn't stop *any* of this. She felt so disoriented, like she couldn't find the earth under her feet. She had always had her rules to guide her, but she had broken all of them for him. How was she supposed to get back to that now?

Dumbledore's eyes widened in surprise behind his spectacles. "I have no intention of harming Mr. Malfoy. In fact, I am hoping for the opposite."

She let out a breath she didn't know she had been holding.

"I must say, your concern for him is something I had not expected."

Oh no... In a moment of weakness, she had let her guard slip. She hadn't even stopped to think what Dumbledore might say about that fact that she was worried about the well being of the person she just named as a Death Eater.

Hermione looked down at her hands in her lap. She had picked her nails down to the beds again. "Neither did I."

She should hate him. She should hate him for all the lies, the names, the utter disrespect, but she couldn't find it in her to do so. She was certainly angry and upset with him, but that didn't mean that her other feelings had just gone away. It was the sad, awful truth that she hadn't wanted to admit to herself; there was nothing that Draco could do that would stop her from loving him.

"Ah," Dumbledore said softly and Hermione turned her large eyes up to his again. "I see."

She felt her blood rush into her face. Was it that obvious? One comment and he knew? But this was Dumbledore and he did have an uncanny way of just... knowing things.

"It must have taken a lot of courage for you to come here this evening."

She looked back down at her hands and bit her lip. "Thank you, sir."

It had taken courage for Draco to take the Veritaserum and be honest with her. He could have erased her memory of his mark and had her go one just life before, but he didn't. He chose to open up in hopes that she would... accept him as he was. Give him a chance. Hermione brain began to whirl.

Dumbledore gave her a few moments before he gently leaned forward. "There are some whom our hearts are drawn to, no matter what our minds may tell us."

She looked back up at him, biting her lip so hard it hurt. His voice was soft and warm and almost like... he knew. Like he knew what this felt like. The constant longing. Constant heartbreak. And above all else, constant love.

"I am trying to save him," Dumbledore said with such sincerity that Hermione's heart surged. "I wasn't sure he'd want to be saved. Until now."

It skipped a beat. "And you think that's because of me? That I can save him?"

"I think you could be instrumental in Draco saving himself. He is a powerful young man, but terribly misguided. I believe that he thinks he is doing the right thing."

"No, he doesn't!" Hermione sat forward. "He's only doing this for his family and because V-Voldemort threatened to kill him—"

"Exactly!" Dumbledore interjected. "It is a common issue I have been with many students who come from Pureblood families; although they spend years with classmates from different backgrounds and lifestyles, they have been conditioned from such a young age that often by the time they arrive here it is almost impossible for them to reject the ideologies they have been indoctrinated with."

“But it’s not too late for Draco!” Hermione jumped to her feet and Dumbledore looked up at her. “He’s not a bad person, we can’t just give up on him because he’s—”

Dumbledore’s eyes had a curious gleam in them and Hermione awkwardly sat back down again.

“What I mean to say is that he... he...”

“I think you said exactly what you meant,” Dumbledore smiled warmly at her. “And I agree; I do not think it is ever too late for redemption and I don’t think I have ever known someone who deserved a second chance more than Draco.”

A second chance? Was that possible? She wanted that *so much*, but had no idea how they could. She had meant what she said; Draco wasn’t a bad person, despite the things he did. She *knew* Draco, the real Draco, and he was thoughtful, caring, and surprisingly generous. She had kept thinking about everything he had done *to* her, but still remembered everything he had done *for* her. Taking her flying, creating the chaise in the room, not to mention the way he kissed her sometimes. With gentle control and pressure, opening up a part of her that only he had ever been interested in seeing more of. Only him.

Her brain began to move faster, pulling together what Dumbledore was telling her now and what Draco had told her the other night. If he had done all those things *thinking*, or at least convincing himself, that they were right, she could understand that a little. She had helped a convicted murder escape the Ministry, formed an illegal student army, put a woman in a jar in blackmailed her, and even set a Professor’s robes on fire. Those hadn’t been *wrong*, although they had been a little less than right in other people’s eyes. What had Draco said to her? That everything was wrong to someone and just do what feels good and try to make it to the next day? She didn’t know how she would have made it this year without him. Or how she was going to make it going forward without him.

He had taken the mark, but he hadn’t done anything unforgivable yet, had he? Maybe only to her. The lies, the cruel words... would those change if he changed too?

He took Veritaserum for you. He doesn’t want to lie anymore.

Only after he tried to erase her memory. And as soon as it wore off, he spat as much venom at her as he could.

He said he loved you.

And the truth buried deep in her bruised heart was that meant more to her than anything else he said. Despite his beliefs, his background, his mark, Draco loved her. He was confused and honestly, so was she! All of this was so disorienting and she had never felt this disconcerted or lost or unbalanced. She had clung to structure to keep her life in control and then... and then she had let Draco take it. She had let him take everything.

There was only one way she could get it back.

“I’m sorry, Professor, I need to go.” Hermione stood up.

“I thought you might,” Dumbledore gave her a caring smile. “And I too have another engagement this evening. Please remember, you are welcome back for tea anytime, Miss Granger.”

Hermione took a deep breath and felt herself tighten and loosen all at once. "Thank you, Professor. I'd like that."

Draco stared at the Vanishing Cabinet. He felt a strange sense of calm settle over him; not a warm gentle peace, but a cold empty numbness. This was what he had been sent here to do. This was what his Master required of him. After this, there would be no going back.

No more wondering what if or what could have been. No more trying to figure out what he could do to say to make her forgive him or do to make her come back. She wasn't. She wouldn't. And that was all there was to it. He was a Death Eater and she was a Muddblood. He sighed and rubbed his hand over his drawn face. She wasn't that anymore and he couldn't pretend she was. Another thing he couldn't do. Another failure.

Just like his father. Maybe it was better that Lucius die in prison than see what his only son and heir had turned into. A drunken, lovesick fool who couldn't even kill an old man to save his own skin. His father probably would prefer staring at a grey wall holding him captive than see Draco pissing away his future for some gash. He had always been disappointed in Draco and now he thought he understood why. His father had taken the Malfoy name to new heights and what had Draco ever done but get pissed and chase tail? His father was right to be ashamed of him; he was ashamed of himself.

What would Lucius be like once he got out? Would he be crippled and broken from the despair and illness? Would he be deranged and maniacal like Bellatrix? Would there be anything left of the man that Draco had worshipped as a boy? Extended exposure to dementors was known to have lifelong effects and being weakened by illness, they were sure to take root in him.

Should he be released? Once he was, he would join the Dark Lord's ranks once more and do unspeakable things in his name. Shit, he had attacked Granger and her friends last year! He could have killed her.

Draco's blood ran cold. The Dark Lord allowed his servants to redeem themselves by taking vengeance on those who had wronged them, like Bellatrix and her Blood Traitor sister's family she kept going on about. Would his father go after Granger again? And if he did, what would he do? He couldn't stand by and let his father kill the girl he loved, but could he do what needed to be done to stop him? He knew what he *wanted* to do.

What was *happening* to him? Why was he having these thoughts? They were dangerous; they were *traitorous*. If the Dark Lord even suspected a *hint* of disloyalty, it wouldn't matter to him if Draco was a Malfoy for a Pureblood or anything. He'd kill him just like anyone else. So if the Dark Lord didn't care about his blood, should he?

His chest tightened and his heart gave an extra thump. If he didn't care about his blood then where did that leave him? He'd have nothing. Less than nothing because he still wouldn't even have her. The only way they could make this work, be together, is if she would have come with him. If she would have chosen him and let him protect her. The Ministry was going to fall and there was nothing her little Order could do to stop it.

Nothing but hope their bodies tripped the Dark Lord on his path of power.

But he could fly, so there went that plan.

And she would die alongside them. Unless he could save her.

But he had fucked that up too because he'd treated her... like a Mudblood. Using her and lying to her and never fucking loving her like he should have.

His chest constricted and his breath caught in his throat. Granger deserved to spend the last few months or, if she was lucky, years of her life with someone who was good to her, good *for* her.

He knew deep down it would never be him, but Sweet Salazar, he wanted it to be.

He counted to three and pushed the painful thoughts behind a mental wall, closing them off. Granger didn't want him anymore. She wanted someone like Weasley who didn't treat her like shit and who was brave enough to hold her fucking hand in public and who probably would never make her come a single day in her life, but that's who she wanted.

Not him. Not anymore. His dreams of having her leave here with him, and be with him were just more fantasies he had made up. She had given him a taste and he had swallowed whole, letting himself get lost in the idea of Granger loving him enough to choose him. To actually want to be with him.

If he'd just kept it all under control, he might have been able to steal her away, but she wouldn't even come near him now. He'd lost his chance at saving her. He'd as good as killed her himself.

Fuck.

The last mental wall slid into place and the icy sense of lack of emotion passed over him. Her rich brown eyes, and sweet smile, and tender warmth all faded from his mind. The cold inside him intensified, a strange comparison to the June heat that was streaming in from the high windows as fiery golden light. Draco shrugged out of his coat and rolled his sleeves up to his elbows.

His breathing started to come easier and he tried not to think about what he was about to do. What he had to do. Because he had no other choice. He pulled out his wand and tapped the Cabinet to open it. He had a stash of parchment and a quill sitting beside the Cabinet and ripped off a small piece, quickly writing on it.

He didn't know why he felt so upset, he had known it would come to this all along. He had known since August what he had to do and what would happen if he didn't. He had failed at everything else; being a proper son and heir, achieving awards and honors in school, and being the kind of man who Granger could love. No, not Granger—Hermione.

She was Hermione.

She'd always been Hermione.

He closed his eyes and whispered the incantation to pass the note through. Borgin knew the deal, he would pass it along to Bellatrix and she would of course jump at the opportunity. He looked down at the mark on his arm. The same as her's, the same as his father's. Both had been locked in Azkaban, both ruined by it. Would that be his fate too?

It didn't matter. He could be surrounded by a hundred dementors and none of them could make him feel any worse than he did now.

Draco opened the Cabinet again and the note was gone. His face was stoic and expressionless. He threw his fist into the stack of random objects beside the Cabinet. He hit something solid and hot pain shot up his arm.

Fuck.

He did it again.

"FUCK!"

"Draco?"

Hermione.

Hermione was frozen in place as Draco spun around, grey eyes storming wildly. He looked half mad, his white blond hair messy on top of his head and his shirt untucked. One hand was balled into a fist and the other held his wand like a weapon. He raised it up quickly, aiming right at her.

She just stood there, unable to look away or even lift her own wand up to match his. What was he doing in here and with that weird piece of furniture? What had she walked in on?

She had come here straight from Dumbledore's office. It would have made more sense to check his other haunts first, but somehow, she just *knew* he'd be here. She didn't know exactly *how* she had gotten in when Harry had tried dozens of times and never been able to break in, but she had just paced up and down the corridor three times thinking about him him him and then the door had appeared.

She had yanked it open quickly and then her jaw dropped open at the sight in front of her. She had been here before; Draco had ordered her in after the incident with Ron and she had thought it was just some random form the Room had taken. She never stopped to think it was where Draco had been disappearing for months.

Impossibly large towers of furniture with books, cauldrons, and glass bottles stuck into every crevice, every space and took up the entirety of the oversized room. In between the stacks were paths; some wide enough that a Hogwarts carriage could fit down them, others so small Hermione wasn't sure she'd be able to pass between. To call it impressive would be an understatement. This place was *unbelievable*.

Her next thought had been how she was ever going to find Draco in here. He could be anywhere, doing anything. She could shout out his name, but it might bring one of the piles down on her and she had no idea what else or who else might be in here to hear her. And there was always the chance he wouldn't want to speak with her and there had to be a hundred places he could duck into to avoid her if he wanted.

She picked a path pretty much at random because where else was she going to start and hurried down it. Hermione jumped back as a large stuffed troll came into view and pulled out her wand. She should be more careful. If something happened to her in here, who knew how

long it would be before help would arrive? Taking a turn she passed a cauldron large enough to hold the whole Gryffindor Quidditch team in it and then some. She stopped when she saw that the bottom had been melted through.

Hermione ran her hand over the black iron side of it. What sort of potion could have done that and who had tried to brew so much of it? She shook her head to clear it. She needed to focus on finding Draco, not on the vast amount of hidden and ruined objects in here.

But goodness, she could have spent *days* exploring and still not found everything. She pushed herself onwards towards Draco. She had come here to tell him... well, she wasn't sure exactly, but she knew she needed to talk to him just to get some sort of explanation or... closure. It wasn't exactly that she wanted it *from* him, but she needed it *for* herself. Her conversation with Dumbledore had made her look at everything he said differently. Maybe it had just taken time for her to sort through it all and organize it, but now she finally was ready to... talk. To consider what he was asking, offering, giving.

This was so unlike her, rushing headfirst into something without thinking it through or planning it out, but... Hermione bit her lip. Everything was different with Draco.

She heard something in the distance, but in the way was a large stack of broomsticks, empty cages, and... good Godric, was that a *cannon*? Hermione rushed forward, trying to find her way around the random junk piled up in front of her. She passed by a box full of crystal balls that filled with a hazy grey mist as she moved by them and then saw a small cut through in the direction that the noise had come from.

She squeezed between a large table and an overturned telescope before emerging back onto a walkable path. Her footsteps were light and quick as she passed a broken globe of a planet that was clearly not earth and then he appeared in front of her, standing before a large cabinet looking thing and raised his fist.

She hadn't really even meant to say his name, but it had just come out and now he was standing before her, frame moving with each heavy breath, making his wand lift from her chest to her face and back down, but never off her.

He slammed the cabinet shut.

"What are you doing here?" Draco growled. The angles in his face were deeply shadowed and combined with his black shirt made a stark contrast on his pale marble face.

Hermione took a small step forward. "What is that?"

"What are you doing here, Granger?" he asked more forcefully. Hermione didn't answer. 'Fuck!' Draco lowered his wand and she took another step. He raised it quickly back up. "Why did you come here? Why did you have to... *Fuck*, Granger!"

He was agitated and upset by her appearance here, but... not with her. He didn't want her to see whatever he was doing and not just because it was something he shouldn't, but because it was *her* who was seeing it. What was he doing? Was there something in the cabinet he didn't want her to see? Was he hiding something in there?

"Draco," she said his name softly and he lifted his eyes back up to hers. They were troubled and wary. Like he didn't trust her, or maybe himself. "What is that thing?"

"I don't have to answer your questions anymore, Granger. You saw to that."

"I want to talk to you."

Draco snarled at her. "Come to tell me how you don't love me again? Thanks, but I got the message the first time. Then again when you fucked off with your new boyfriend."

The lion in her chest sat up and growled a little. "Ron is not my boyfriend. And I certainly don't want him to be."

"Did you lie to him?" Draco sneered at her. "Told him I was making it all up? That the big, bad Slytherin was just out to get you and you're really just a good little girl who's never done anything naughty in her whole life?"

Hermione lifted her chin up. "I have done naughty things. I've done them and I've enjoyed them. I loved them." She took a step towards him and Draco watched her carefully. "And I thought that's all this was, for a long time. But then—" she sucked in a breath.

"Then what?" Draco asked, voice a little softer, but still demanding.

"Then I fell in love with you."

Draco looked like he had been stunned; the marble mask on his face cracked and shattered. Hermione watched as his mouth slowly opened, but no breath passed into him. He blinked and his eyes changed from dark and stormy to a soft rain grey. *Draco.*

The last bit of air left in his lungs was sharply forced out and he seemed unable to do anything but stare disbelievingly at her. His hand had fallen to his side, wand pointed uselessly at the floor. He wasn't moving, wasn't even breathing and Hermione realized that she wasn't either.

Her eyes darted down to his wand and on their way back up, she saw the black skull and dark twisting serpent on his ivory skin. The sight of it made her want to cringe, to pull away from him, but this was why she was here. So she took a breath and closed the distance left between them, stopping in front of him.

"Don't fucking lie to me." His voice was laced with deep emotions; fear, anger, and hurt.

Hermione's heart swelled at the sight of him, scared, nervous, and maybe a little hopeful. She shook her head, a few tawny curls falling down around her face. "I don't know what this means, but I know that... that I love you, Draco Malfoy."

"Oh, *Hermione.*" Draco's arms were around her, pulling her into him, holding her, containing her like he was scared she was going to run away.

Hermione took a breath, a *full* breath and smelled his crisp mint and creamy parchment scent. God, she had missed it. She had missed everything about him, everything she hadn't let herself think about, remember, or feel. His chest was firm and pressing against hers with every quick breath he took. She wanted to stay right here forever.

"You mean it?" Draco pulled back, still holding onto her, and bent his head down, searching her face. "You... you love me?"

She nodded and biting her lip said, "I don't think I'll ever stop."

“Don’t stop,” Draco ran and his hand up her back and into her hair. “Merlin, don’t *ever* stop.”

“But that’s the problem, Draco,” Hermione tried to explain. ‘You... you’re so mean to me. No one has ever treated me like you do and,’ she sniffed. “And I feel so stupid because no matter what you say or do I still feel like this and I can’t—” she felt her breathing speed up. “I can’t stop loving you.”

Draco’s hands tightened on her and he leaned down, pressing his head against hers. “I can’t either. Fuck, I love you so much, it’s *burning* my blood with it. With you.”

Hermione’s brows pulled together and she felt her throat tighten a little. “Then why do you hurt me like you do? You flirted with Pansy right in front of me, you called me— *that* again, you almost *told* Ron about—”

“I’m sorry!” Draco cut her off. ‘I’m so sorry, Sweetheart.’ He looked deep into her eyes. “I didn’t mean it, you know that. I’m a fuck up, I can’t help it. I’m so sorry— for what I said, what I did... I... I don’t know why I do that. Why I try to hurt the people who care about me. But I don’t want to. I want you. I want this.”

Hermione’s chest felt like it was caving in again. There were so many things she wanted to say, wanted to shout, but all that came out was a whisper. “I don’t want you to hurt me again.”

“Look at me,” he tilted her face up to his. “I swear on Salazar’s watery grave, I won’t hurt you. Not if you...” Her heart was bursting, begging to jump out of her chest and back into Draco’s arms. “Just give me one more chance, I’ll be good to you. I’ll take care of you.”

Oh God, everything he was saying was exactly what she wanted to hear, but hadn’t it always been just the right thing? Hadn’t he always known what to say, how to touch her, what to make her feel so that she would come back? And each time it had been better than before then worse. So much worse. And there was still the mark... what did that mean for them?

“When you took the Veritaserum, you said I shouldn’t give you another chance.”

“I... I don’t know why I said that,” he exhaled deeply. “But I want you to and I’ll do everything in my power to make this up to you. Anything. Everything.”

How was this going to work? She didn’t want to ask him to choose her over his family, what sort of person would that make her? But at the same time, how could she not at least try and help him? Dumbledore had said he needed to save himself, but he wasn’t doing this for glory or power, he was doing this for the people he loved. And she had become one of those people.

Tension rang inside her, tightening until she felt like she might burst. “I want to, but, I don’t know how.”

Draco went still. “What does that mean?”

Hermione looked up into his storm cloud eyes. “Everything between us was tainted by lies and I don’t know what was real and what wasn’t and—”

He grabbed her face and made her look up at him. “Granger, you know it was real. You *know* that. I lied to you, but... never about that. This,” he pulled her hand up and pushed over his heart. “This never lied to you.”

Hermione felt like something was about to explode in her chest. “Draco, I don’t know how to do this with you anymore. Honestly, how is this going to work? You’re a Death Eater!”

“I’m not a very good one,” he said with bitter sarcasm.

Hermione blinked up at him. “What?”

“Well for starters,” he tilted his head. “I’m in love with you.”

“Draco—”

“Yes, Hermione?” *Her name.* He grinned at her. She felt his pull on her heartstrings, dragging her bruised heart from the deep place she had hidden it and trying to take it back. “You say you don’t know how to do this? I’ll show you. Like *this*—”

He pulled her close to him and pressed his lips to hers.

Oh God, it felt so good to kiss him again. The creature inside her purred happily and the bubbles rose back up into her chest. Draco’s lips moved with hers, a passionate pressure pushing her onwards as his hands slid over her body. She wanted to lean into him, wrap her arms around his neck and give into *all* of this again.

He wanted her. He wanted this. And he said he would make everything up to her, give her everything. Surely he knew what that meant, what she needed from him? He must have thought this through and he was still willing to do it. For her. Hermione’s heart surged with emotion, beating to the point of bursting, and she kissed him back fervently.

This was happening. This was real. Draco was going to leave it all behind and they could start again. If he could put everything in the past, certainly she could too, right? They deserved a happy ending. They had already been through so much in such a short time and there would be more they had to go through, but at least they could do it together.

“I want you,” Hermione murmured against his lips.

Draco made a noise deep in his throat and her body hummed along with it. She felt her blood move quickly in her and heat pooled in her lower stomach. They had their problems they had to work through, but *this* had never been one of them.

“Draco, I want you right now,” she gasped. “Please.”

“*Fuck*,” he said softly. “Oh kitten, I thought I’d never hear you beg me again.”

Hermione felt heated arousal rush through her veins. She blinked slowly and watched as the blacks of his eyes expanded. “Please, Draco,” she breathed out. “I need you. I need *this*.”

Draco growled and grabbed her under her backside, lifting her up onto him. Hermione gasped a little and wrapped her legs around his waist, clinging tightly to his shoulders.

Draco was breathing heavily and she could see the lust rising up in his smoky grey eyes. “I’m going to fuck you like you should be fucked.”

Oh my... Hermione felt her body clench in anticipation and Draco started moving, walking down one of the pathways quickly and Hermione glanced around, watching as piles of rubbish passed them by. Finally he stopped and held her tightly to him with one arm as he

pulled a musty blanket off of a large four poster bed, throwing it to the ground as a cloud of dust rose up from it.

The bed might have been the largest one Hermione had ever seen. One of the wooden posts was broken and another was charred, but other than that it seemed to be in decent condition. Wispy white curtains hung around it and Draco lifted her up and little before throwing her down on the bed.

Hermione bounced a few times and laughed as Draco crawled onto the bed with her. She scooted back, giving him room, but he gave her a wolfish grin and grabbed her leg, pulling her back across the bed and towards him.

“Oh you’re not getting away from me this time,” he growled playfully.

Hermione giggled as he ran his hands up her body then back down to her legs, pushing them open and kneeling in between them. His eyes travelled the length of her and Hermione leaned back, sighing. All the times they had been together, it had never been in a bed. The chaise was the closest thing, but this felt different, meaningful. Her hands spread out, touching the soft white sheets.

Draco leaned down over her, placing a hand on either side of her head. “Tell me you love me.”

Hermione smiled at him. “I love you, Draco.”

“Again.” His silver eyes shined.

“I love you, Draco.”

He grinned. “I love hearing you say that. Maybe even more than hearing you beg for my cock.” He gave her a quick kiss to stop the small scoff she was chastising him with and leaned back up on his knees.

He slid his hand under the hem of her shirt and his fingers were cool against the skin of her stomach. “I want this,” he pulled it over her chest and Hermione lifted herself up a little so he could slide it over her head and arms. “Off.”

Hermione fell back against the pillow giggling a little. “And this,” he growled playfully pulling at the middle of her bra. “I’d be happy to never see this again.” She felt the cool air hit her breasts as her bra fell to the floor with her shirt.

Her nipples hardened slightly and Draco cupped her breasts, palming them and pushing them up on her chest. He sucked in a heavy breath. “I fucking love your tits,” he muttered before leaning down and taking one in his mouth. Draco moaned as he sucked on the nipple, flicking his tongue over it in his mouth.

She took a deep breath and her chest expanded with it, pushing up towards him. Oh God, how could she have ever not wanted *this*? But now she had it. She had *him*. He was hers and they were going to be together. Draco released her nipple from in between his lips and smirked at her again.

“Are you wet for me?” he asked huskily.

Hermione felt the familiar pulsing heat between her legs and slight sense of embarrassment at his dirty words. She bit her lip and nodded.

Draco placed his hands on her hips and gave her a sly smile. "Maybe I should check, just to be sure." He pulled at the button on her jeans. "Would you like that, pet?"

Hermione made a small noise and nodded eagerly, trying her best not to smile like an schoolgirl. "You should definitely check."

Draco smirked at her and started pulling her jeans off. "You dirty little slut."

Maybe it was the euphoria of their reconciliation or the fact that after weeks of being miserable, Hermione was one of the happiest she had *ever* felt, but she didn't stop herself from saying, "Your dirty little slut." Draco eyes cut back up to her quickly as he hooked a finger on either side of her knickers. "Sir."

"Oh kitten..." Draco's voice was strained, but deep with longing. He leaned down and trailed a line of kisses from one hip to the other before he pulled her knickers the rest of the way off. "You deserve a treat for that."

Oh, he was doing it again, making something wrong sound so right. Hermione sunk back into the bed and felt Draco shifting a little lower down.

"Fuck, you're beautiful." Draco had pulled his erection from his trousers and was stroking it as he kneeled with her legs on either side of him, gazing down at her. "And *this*," he breathed out sharply and leaned down so his face was in between her thighs. Draco ran a single finger over her slit and Hermione's stomach clenched tightly.

"Such a pretty pussy." He spread it apart and she could feel her heart beating madly, blood racing into every inch of her. 'I could sit here for hours and play with it.' His mouth was so close to her she could feel the breath of each word, cool and soft. Hermione looked down the length of her body to see him staring at it with dark, lustful eyes. "Make you come until you go numb."

She felt like she might ignite any second or maybe just explode if he didn't touch her soon. "*Granger...*" he slid a finger slowly inside her and Hermione let out a high-pitched moan. "You're so *fucking* wet."

Draco kissed the inside of her thigh. "You must have missed me, your little pussy is quivering already."

"I missed you so much," she said breathlessly. "I never want to go through that again. I never want to leave you again."

"I missed you too," Draco said in his low voice, breathing against her. "I missed my good little whore with her pretty pussy she only lets *me* fuck."

Hermione gasped as Draco slid a second finger in, pushing them deeper into her. Fire was shooting in her veins and she looked down at him to see him stroking himself along with the pumps of his fingers.

"I only ever want you, Draco," she whimpered. "Only you."

Draco groaned and latched his mouth onto the soft skin of her thigh, sucking on it then biting it, sinking his teeth into her.

The fire was raging in her and she lifted her hips, meeting his movements.

Draco ran his thumb in a circle around her sensitive bud and Hermione moaned, her chest shaking with it.

“Don’t worry about that,” Draco smirked. “I’ll never let anyone else have you. I’ll never let you go. You’re mine.”

A thrum of pleasure reverberated through her whole body and it shook. His lips were on her thigh again, kissing the bite mark and sucking on it as he slid his fingers into her faster. The circles around her clit became smaller and smaller until he was on it, pressing his thumb into it and she felt the heat in her rise into a slow explosion, reaching up and down her entire body and creating a steaming cloud of pleasure and bliss that filled her head. She felt herself tighten on him and Draco’s mouth responded by sucking harder on her thigh as she rode out the wave of her orgasm.

“Mmm, good girl,” Draco cooed softly and kissed up her thigh to and then over her lower stomach. Hermione gasped, trying to catch her breath and listened to her wild heartbeat in her ears. Draco planted a soft kiss against her swollen, sensitive clit and Hermione cried out. Her body convulsed with an after shock and she heard Draco chuckle at what he had done.

“Such a whore,” he said affectionately. How could he make that sound so good sometimes and so terrible others? “I bet I could lick it... five times and make you come again.”

Hermione looked down at her. “What?”

Draco smirked at her. “One.” He ran his tongue over her clit.

“Oh, God, Draco!” Hermione’s body tightened sharply again. It was still so tender from his attention on it that even the light pressure of his tongue was like sweet pain.

Draco placed his hand on her, spreading her open. “Two.” He did it slower this time.

Hermione whimpered and tried to push his head away from her. She grabbed his hair, but Draco pulled against it. “Push me away and I’ll bite it.” Hermione dropped her hand back down. Draco made a happy humming noise as he dipped his head back down. “Three.”

He flicked it fast and her hips bucked up, trying to follow him. Oh, God, how was this happening again so soon? Draco softly laughed.

“Please, Draco,” Hermione moaned. She didn’t exactly know what she was begging for, him to stop or to keep going or what, so she just closed her eyes and gave in.

“Four.” He kissed her. Soft and sensual, his tongue tenderly pressed against her and his lips encircled her.

Hermione’s body fell into nothingness, everythingness. She heard herself moaning loudly, trying to form his name, but wasn’t able to do anything but feel the tortuous pleasure licking away at her.

She made a weak, pitiful noise and her blood felt hot in her veins. Too hot. Burning. God, she loved it. Hermione sucked in a deep breath and her eyes slowly opened. That was... intense, but *incredible*.

"So, four is the number to beat." He sat up, a smug smile on his handsome face. Hermione's arms and legs felt too heavy to move. She laid there, breathing deeply as Draco played with himself a little more and watched his eyes move over her, hovering in places and growing dark. "How was that?"

Hermione felt sluggishly satisfied and all she could come up with was a breathy, "Good."

Draco's face fell a little. "Good?" He sounded offended. Hermione tried to fill her lungs in hopes oxygen would make the fog in her mind dissipate. "That's it? That's all you have to say?"

She tried again. "Thank you."

Draco's eyes turned a deep, smoking grey. "That's more like it." He moved up on the bed next to her, leaning on his side and resting his head in his palm while he spread his other hand out over her stomach.

This. Felt. So. *Good*.

Letting go of the pain and the anger and frustration and hurt and resentment and everything else that she had been focusing on instead of the fact that she loved him and he loved her. She hadn't even considered this as an option, being with him again, but now, she couldn't imagine any other alternative.

"I can't believe this is happening," she said softly.

Draco leaned closer to her and pushed his hand lower. "Do you need me to prove it to you again?"

She grabbed his wrist, feeling his muscles flex but not fight her, and pulled his arm back. "You're incorrigible," she giggled.

Draco shrugged. "You turn me on. I love watching you come."

"And here I thought you just liked coming on me."

"Coming in you is a hundred times better," he said darkly. "Feeling your tight little pussy squeeze me and getting to mark you on the inside—"

"Draco!" Hermione pushed her hands into his chest. He grabbed them and held them there. "You've let me mark up every other part of you; neck, tits, ass..." he slid his hand down to her thigh. "Left you another little treat down there, pet."

Hermione looked down and saw the beginnings of a bruised bite mark and stained skin of a hickey where he had his mouth. She had to admit, she liked his possessiveness just a little. And more than a little when he did things like that.

"Is that to let everyone know where you've been?" she said playfully.

Draco narrowed his eyes. "No. No one else is going to see that because it's only two inches away from your pussy and—"

“I was joking.”

“Fucking better be,” he grumbled, but she saw his lips twitch.

Hermione pulled at the collar of his black shirt. Why Draco insisted on wearing button down shirts every day, she’d never understand. Did he even *own* a casual shirt? “You try and act all *bad*, but I know deep down, you’re really just sweet.”

“Sweet?” He raised his brows. Hermione smiled and nodded against the pillow. Draco grinned. “I can be sweet.”

He pushed himself on top of her. “I can be very sweet.”

Hermione breathed out. “Prove it.”

He kissed her, slow and deep. Hermione ran her hands up into his hair, pulling him down into her as she sunk back against the bed under his weight. Draco lifted himself from her a little, making sure he didn’t crush her under him. It felt like it had been hours they had been here, but she knew in reality it couldn’t have been more than twenty minutes. Is this what it was going to be like from now on?

Draco pulled back a little and gazed hungrily down at her. She had seen that expression on him enough times to know what he was thinking behind those silver shields of his. He had sated her twice, but he hadn’t found his own release yet. Hermione shifted under him, spreading her legs a little wider.

And she started on the buttons of his shirt. He’d never really let her do this before, not without careful consideration and anxious apprehension taking away from the experience of being able to undress him. Oh wow... everything was so different now. She wanted to plunge her hands into his shirt, run them over his smooth chest, but controlled herself and continued on until his shirt was completely undone.

Draco sat up and pulled his shirt back off his shoulders and down his arms. Hermione couldn’t help but gasp.

Jagged white lines crossed over his chest and stomach, marking the once pristine skin with evidence of a dark curse.

He froze, watching her face and then pulled the shirt back over his arm. “I... I’ll put it back on so you don’t have to see—”

She followed his line of sight and realized they were thinking two very different things. She hadn’t even noticed the mark. Hermione’s heart gave an extra hard beat. She hadn’t even *noticed* the mark. It had plagued her thoughts every day and now when it was in front of her, when *he* was in front of her, it was like it wasn’t even there.

“It’s not that,” she murmured and traced her fingers over one of the white scars on his lower stomach.

He looked down at her hand and then himself, frowning. “Yeah, he... it fucked me up.”

Harry. Harry had done this. Everything was so muddled now, lines were blurred and things that had once been so clear were now distorted. A single moment in time, a *mistake*, had marked him forever.

Hermione traced the lines across his body. "Do they hurt?"

He shook his head. "No. They just look ugly."

She had only ever seen his chest a few times, but it certainly had been quite a sight. The scars didn't make it ugly, but she was sure they were a painful reminder of what had happened and everything leading up to it. Her marble statue was cracked, but not broken.

"I was so scared, Draco. You looked like you were dying," she looked up into his hazy grey eyes. "That night I came to see you in the hospital wing."

"I wanted to," he said softly. "Hearing you say those things about what I'd done to you."

Hermione's chest tightened. There was so much, *so much*, that happened, that they needed to talk about, but... she didn't want to. Not right now, at least. They had time to do all that later, they had *so much* time now.

"I told you I loved you that night," Draco placed his hand over hers, holding it against him. "I just couldn't say it out loud, but... I said it to myself."

Draco was being open and honest with her, on his own. *Finally*. Something had changed in him, he was... more relaxed around her. Not guarded and wary like he had been. He was... happy.

"I should have told you. I should have told you everything, from the very beginning. Granger, I—"

"Stop," Hermione said firmly. 'Come here.' Draco leaned back over her. "Draco," she ran her hand over his heart, feeling the oddly smooth but carved scar against her palm. "It doesn't matter. None of that matters anymore."

They could start again. Start fresh. Together. Draco was putting everything he believed in the past and turning away from Voldemort. If he was willing to do that for her, she was willing to forgive him. It might be hard for other people to accept, but surely they would be able to see the difference in him that was so clear to her now.

Draco closed his eyes for a moment. "I'm so glad you're doing this. You don't know what this means to me."

Forgiving him and allowing him back in her life was a big step, one that she was taking with shaky legs, but one that she was taking because he was taking an even bigger one and leaving his past behind him.

Hermione touched his face. "You're doing so much for me, I'm so proud of you."

Draco had a slightly curious expression on his face like he didn't quite understand what she was saying and then shook his head. "I don't think anyone has ever said that to me before; that they're proud of me."

How was that possible? With how confident, and honestly arrogant he was, how could it be that no one had ever told him they were proud of him? Certainly his father or mother or even Snape had said it at some point. But... the very little he had mentioned about his family didn't exactly paint a loving picture. He had taken the mark to help his father who couldn't even be bothered to say he was proud of his son. It seemed... inhuman for a father to not care

for his child like that, but then again, there were many things about Pureblood society she couldn't wrap her mind around.

She placed her palm fully against his cheek. "Well, let me be your first."

Draco smiled. A true and honest smile. "Oh Sweetheart," he breathed out. "You're so much more than that. You're my *only*."

His lips enveloped hers, soft and sensual. Taking his time, Draco slowly turned the soft kiss into a deeper one, opening his mouth to let his tongue move into hers, pressing against her own before sliding over it softly, moving their lips in time together.

Hermione's hands slid over his sides, feeling the muscles tighten under her touch until she came to the waistband of his trousers. They were undone from earlier and she pushed them down over his hips. Draco shifted, kicking them off and then settling his body back down.

He felt so good on top of her. She could feel the rough hairs on his legs and the firmness of his chest as it pressed deeply on her own. His skin was cool and was soothing against her own burning flesh, heated by the arousal in her blood.

Draco pulled her farther under him and she felt as his hard length rested against the tender bite mark on her inner thigh. She could feel his heart beating in his chest, against hers, matching it thump for thump.

His hand slid down her body and over the slope of her waist. "Everything is going to change, but it's going to be worth it."

"Oh, Draco," she breathed out. It was almost hard to believe that this was actually happening, but here he was, saying it. Hermione shifted under him and brought her legs up around him, squeezing his hips with her knees. Then because she had to say it or she was going to burst added, "I love you."

He made a noise deep inside his throat and then reached down between them and guide himself inside of her.

"Oh God, Draco!" Hermione clasped her hands on his shoulders, closing her eyes tightly against the feeling of his size inside her again.

"Granger, fuck," he groaned and slowly pulled himself back and then slid into her warmth again.

It wasn't like the other times. Not when he bent her over and pushed all of himself in at once or when he held her down and fucked her hard and fast, or even when he teased her, barely letting her have him at all. This was something different than they had ever done before. Laying together in a bed, her body wrapped around him in every way it could and Draco breathing heavily as he slowly dipped himself into her.

This was... love. Draco was making love to her.

"Yes," her head sunk into the pillow underneath and Draco's mouth attached itself to her exposed neck. His lips sucked at her skin, softly pulling and kissing it when he released it back. "Yes, yes, yes."

The feeling of him was wonderful. He began to move a little faster, building up with each thrust into her. He was moaning into her neck, her hair, her ear and sending frissons down her spine and in between her legs where they mixed with the growing passion burning brighter and higher with each movement.

"I love you," he said in a deep voice. "Fuck, I love you so much."

Hermione gasped as he filled her again. She tightened her legs around him as he drove himself in deeper, running a hand up into his hair and Draco groaned again. Her body rocked with his, extending the pleasure of their movements.

Draco looked down at her with his storming grey eyes. "Tell me you'll come with me. I want to hear you say it."

She'd do anything he wanted right now and she was already close.

"Yes Draco," she whined. "Make me come."

"Fucking hell," Draco hissed and pumped his hips back and forth making Hermione gasp at the quicker movement. He was so deep, so far in her and the pressure of him was, Godric, it was ecstasy. Hermione clung onto him as her body moved under him.

Draco brought his hand up to rest on her neck, fingers diving into her hair as his palm rested against her jaw. "You won't regret this, I promise."

What? Why would she regret this? It didn't matter. The feeling rising up in her pushed everything else away and this felt too good to stop. Pleasure surged into every inch of her as he pushed himself back in her.

She loved him and felt near bursting with it as it filled her again. She loved him even though he had lied to her, hurt her. All that was over now and Draco loved her too and they were going to be okay and this was going to work. Somehow. She didn't know yet, but she had come here tonight not knowing what would happen and look how that turned out.

Hermione's body arched up, pushing into him as he bore down on her. Even with his cool skin she could start sweat pooling between them, mixing together. She held onto him tightly, fingers and nails digging into him as her body absorbed his deep movements in her.

"Draco," she moaned out his name. "Oh God, yes! I want you. I want everything with you. Please, *please*, Draco..."

Draco's mouth found hers again just long enough to let a low groan out into it before he pulled back a little, panting. "It's so good. So fucking tight... Oh Granger, *you're* so good."

Hermione was losing it. Her control, her heart; Draco had it all. She tilted her hips up a little under him and he gratefully sunk down into her. The pressure and pleasure of him inside her was too much, never enough, perfect. She slid her hands down his back a little and clenched her thighs as the fire in her sparked and flared. This was happening, there was no turning back now. In that moment he wasn't a Death Eater or a purist or anything he had ever been. And after tonight he'd never be again.

"I can't stop," he gasped, eyes wide. "Granger, I—"

He leaned heavily onto her, resting himself on the arm bent by her head. She saw something out of the corner of her eyes and looked over to see the dark mark, right there, right next to her. Her whole body tightened and tensed. She told herself it was just another scar, like the ones on his chest. It wasn't anything, it didn't *mean* anything.

"Fucking come for me," Draco pleaded. "I can't hold on, I can't stop—"

He slammed his hips into her and himself into her, pushing her to her limit and then over it.

"Draco!" Hermione cried out as her body contracted and explosions shot off behind her eyes. Her orgasm roared up in her, mixing with the heat of the passion between them and the love beating in her chest and pushed the air from her lungs and her eyes fluttered as it burned from the inside out. The fire in her raged and roared, rising up up up and reaching what felt like her *soul*.

"Fuck!" Draco pressed himself hard into her, his body heavy on top of her smaller one. He wrapped a hand around the back of her head, pulling her up into his neck and chest. "Holy fuck, *Hermione!*"

He came undone inside her. She blinked her eyes wide feeling him release deep and hard. He was straining, twitching, and gave a final small groan before exhaling quickly and panting to catch his breath.

"Oh hell, Sweetheart," he breathed out heavily and laid her head back down on the pillow, hands shaking. "I don't think I've ever come that hard before."

Hermione's mouth opened in a small O before she felt the bubble inside her pop happily. She was looking up into the storm grey eyes of the man who just made love to her. Her heart swelled with love, admiration, and affection for him. Draco. It would always be Draco.

Her lips pulled into a wide smile. Draco stared at her for a few seconds and then returned it with his own. Hermione ran her fingers over his cheek, loving how he looked when he smiled. Really smiled.

Draco leaned down and kissed her tenderly. "You aren't mad at me, are you?"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I'm always mad at you."

"Yeah, you are," he grinned. "And your pouty little glare is so fucking cute."

"Get off of me," Hermione jokingly pushed her hand into his chest and Draco growled, pushing back down on her.

"Never." He smirked. "You're mine." Hermione felt the creature inside her purr pleasantly. "And I think I just proved that."

"You are so vulgar!" Hermione's voice rose higher.

Draco looked guiltily at her. "You were squeezing me between your thighs and with your..." he lifted one brow. "It's been weeks since the last time and I know you said that potion was for accidents, but..." he rolled his eyes dismissively then grinned at her again. "I wanted to. Do you have *any* idea how fucking good it feels to come inside you?"

Hermione's doe eyes were wide with shock and her mouth dropped open. He had always been possessive and controlling, but... last time had actually been an accident, this time he had *meant to*?

"Tell me you love me again. Say it. Tell me you're coming with me." Draco was smiling, silver eyes bright and shining, happier than she had ever seen him.

"W-what?" Did he think... Wait... Did he mean *actually go* somewhere with him?

"Thinking about that, just you and me... Shit, I think that's what did it for me. Knowing that you're mine, all mine, and that you *chose* me and you're coming with me."

Hermione's heart stopped beating. "Draco, what are you—"

"She's not going anywhere with you, you sick fucking bastard." A voice. A male voice. An angry male voice.

Draco's body hardened into cold marble and he moved as quick as a striking snake to look over his shoulder at where the voice had come from.

Hermione's heart stopped beating and she got a clear view of who had spoken from underneath Draco's arm.

At the end of the path to the bed, stood a shaking, red with rage, Ronald Weasley with his wand pointed directly at Draco.

25. twenty five

Chapter 25

It all happened in less than two seconds.

Draco snarled as he grabbed Granger, pulling her hard against him, covering her body with his own. She clung onto his shoulders, nails digging into his flesh like claws. He reached out to grab the sheet from the bed, making sure it covered her body before throwing himself to his feet in a swift movement.

His wand was within reach, but it had been a while since he tested out his Seeker reflexes and he just hoped luck was on his side as he struck out for it. His fingers barely brushed against the dark handle when he was slammed back against one of the posts of the bed and felt a deep pain in the back of his head.

“Draco!”

Darkness.

Thick, black, and heavy.

He could hear something, very far away.... Granger. It was her voice, hauntingly echoing in his head as he tried to pull himself from the daze.

A different voice. Deeper, angry, and loud. Draco tried to find something to hold onto, but there was nothing here. Nothing but the darkness.

He had never been stunned before. Once his father had hit him so hard he fell over and heard a resounding thunk as his head bounced off of the floor. He had woken up with his mother screaming at his father, holding him to her chest. It was a close comparison to this.

But that was a long time ago and he wasn't a little boy anymore.

“What are you doing here? How did you get in?”

He could barely make out the outline of Granger's messy curls and Weasley somewhere in front of her. He was holding up something, something small but tucked it back away in his robes before Draco could blink the blariness from his eyes.

“Him?!” Weasley was shouting at her. Draco groaned in protest. “This is your someone?! **HIM?!?”**

“Ron, don't!”

“Get out of the way, Hermione. I'm going to kill—”

“Stop! Stop! You don't understand!” Granger was pleading with Weasley and Draco fought against the weight pushing him back down into the darkness.

“Grang—” he breathed out. “Granger—”

Her hands were on his chest. Warm. Soft. He could smell cinnamon and vanilla and he followed it up towards her.

Big brown doe eyes were looking down at him.

“Granger,” he croaked again.

“MOVE!”

Granger’s head turned sharply over her shoulder, caramel curls messy and twirling with movement. “Ron, just listen to me!”

Draco blinked, trying to keep his eyes from closing again. Had Weasley stunned him non-verbally? He could barely turn a turtle into a teakettle without muttering the incantation under his breath. How had he been able to—

“Hermione, get *away* from him! He’s got you under some kind of enchantment! He’s probably dosed you with a love potion!”

“No, it’s not what you think!”

Granger had her shirt back on and was trying to reach for her jeans while pointing *his* wand at Weasley. His heart gave an extra thump. Now was not the time for this but, holy shit, he just found a new kink— Granger using his wand, especially Granger using his wand *against* someone else. Oh the possibilities for that in the future...

Draco pushed himself up and reached for her. Weasley trained his wand on him as Draco’s arm snaked around Granger’s waist and pulled her back against him.

“You piece of shit,” Weasley snarled at him, but did not dare approach them with Granger aiming Draco’s wand at him.

Draco’s head was still pounding but he managed a nasty smirk and jerked Granger hard against him, making her gasp a little. “Well done, Sweetheart,” he kissed the side of her head. “Now give me back my wand and I’ll take care of this.”

Weasley was the last obstacle in his way before he could take Granger with him. Where they could finally be together. No one else.

Draco reached for his wand, but Granger held fast to it, pulling it away from him. “No!”

What? Draco scowled. The fuck did she mean *no*?

“Please, just...” she sucked in a quick breath. “You can’t— can’t hurt each other.”

“He can’t hurt me, but I sure as hell can hurt *him*,” Draco growled and went for his wand again. Granger quickly leaned away, moving it out of his reach. How did everyone get so fucking *fast* all of a sudden?

“HE’S A FUCKING DEATH EATER!”

Draco looked down at his outstretched arm. The black brand stood out sharply against his pale skin, shadowed by the faint outline of a bruise around it.

Shit.

“Ron—”

Draco looked up in time to see another stream of light hit him in the chest and the next thing he knew he was lying back on the bed again and Granger was on her feet, completely clothed, and shouting at Weasley who looked like his head had been replaced with an overripe tomato.

Fuckkk, his head hurt. The world was moving slow around him or maybe he was the one moving slow. Either way, he didn’t think he could take a third stunner.

Draco started to sit up again and saw that his trousers were on him and so was his shirt was lying open on his chest exposing the ugly white scars. Granger must have charmed them onto him. He hated that Weasley had seen them. He didn’t want *anyone* to ever see what a mangled mess he was now. Well, anyone but her. When she touched them it sent jolts through the scar tissue, burning in a strangely pleasant way.

“You *KNEW?!* ” Weasley shouted. “You knew and you didn’t tell me or Harry?! He *must* have you enchanted!”

“I told Dumbledore! He told me not to tell anyone!”

What? She... she told Dumbledore?

“He’s not what you think! Not anymore! You have to *listen to me!*”

Draco managed to get upright again despite his pounding head. He wanted his wand back. Weasley wouldn’t fucking stand a chance once he was armed. He looked around and saw Granger’s wand lying half hidden beside a stack of old textbooks. Draco glanced up just to make sure Weasley wasn’t looking and going to stun him again and met his furious blue gaze.

“You cursed her didn’t you?!” Weasley shoved Granger aside and started towards him, “You *imperius’d* her and made her... you made her—” he stopped talking and breathing heavily, looked down at Draco in disgust. “You *sick fuck.*”

“He didn’t!” Granger pulled on Weasley’s arm. “Ron, stop it!”

Draco felt something dark and scaly rise up in him, spitting and ready to strike. He leaned towards Weasley, sneering nastily at him and hurt him the only way he could at the moment. “I didn’t have to curse her to get her to fuck me. Believe me, she *wanted* to.”

Weasley was so red he looked like he might explode and Draco readied himself for another stunning spell to come at him when the asshole’s fist landed heavily on his cheek instead.

“Ron, NO!”

Oh, he was going to fucking *pay* for that. Draco could taste blood in his mouth, but as he turned back for a third time he saw Weasley had turned around and had Granger by the shoulders and was shoving her back down the path.

“Get off of her,” Draco growled, ignoring the pain radiating in his head and swung his legs off the bed to stop Weasley from touching *his* girl. He spat blood onto the ground. Fuck his wand. He’d do this with his bare hands. “Get your filthy blood traitor hands *off of her.*”

Weasley glared at him. “Harry didn’t mean to do this, but I want you to know that *I do*.”

“Ron, no!”

“*Sectum—*”

Granger threw herself in front of Draco. Thank fuck Weasley’s new speed allowed him to pull his wand away at the last minute, sending the curse flying at the bed instead of Granger. Draco wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight and shielding her as the bed they had just shared turned into a shredded white mess of fabric and feathers.

“How could you use that spell? It nearly killed him before!” Granger said admonishingly, heading for Weasley again and pushing her twisting curls out of her face.

“That’s what I’m hoping for!” Weasley shouted red faced as feathers softly fell around them.

Draco pushed Granger behind him slightly and took a step forward. “Think you can take me? I didn’t get this mark because it’s *pretty*, Weasley,” he hissed venomously. He was going to *hurt* Weasley. He was going to hurt him *bad*. He was *good* at that.

“No!” Granger tried to stop him as he started forward. If he could get close enough, he could disarm Weasley through force. Once he was wandless, he’d be easy pickings. “You can’t! He’s taken *felix felicis*, that’s how he got in— he’s lucky!”

Shit. So that’s why all of this was happening. Coils constricted around Draco’s chest making it hard to breathe. This could ruin *everything*. Adrenaline shot into his hands and legs, tightening the muscles there.

“That’s right,” Weasley’s freckled face twisted. “Saw you on the Map. Disappearing. Harry gave it to me along with the *felix* because—” he looked at Draco. “He saw Malfoy coming in here right before he had to go with Dumbledore.”

“Go...” Granger whispered and then started breathing faster. “They... they’ve gone after one?”

Weasley gave her a sharp nod. “Asked me to find you and tell you to watch out. That he thought Malfoy was going to make his move tonight. When I saw you come in here I thought Harry must have found you and told you and you went looking for him.”

Draco had enough of this. He didn’t understand half of what they were saying and cared even less to try. All he cared about was getting Weasley out of the way and getting Granger out of here.

“And when I found you this fucking Death Eater had cursed you and he was—” Weasley’s brows hung low over his eyes, revulsion clear on his face.

“He didn’t! He wouldn’t! Draco wouldn’t hurt me—”

Good girl. God, he fucking loved her.

“You’re not thinking straight. He’s done something to you, he must have!” Weasley’s eyes narrowed dangerously at Draco.

“Oh I’ve done lots of things to her.”

“Stop!” Granger cried as Weasley started towards them. ‘Both of you stop this!’ She swiveled the wand between them. “Ron, you *have to listen* to me— Draco’s not a Death Eater anymore!”

“*What?!*” Draco and Ron both said at the same time.

Granger’s mouth fell open as she turned back to Draco. She looked just as shocked as he felt at the moment and he could tell she wasn’t making up some ruse to try and fool Weaselbee; she *believed* what she had said.

Draco’s blood stilled in his veins. It curdled and turned to acid, eating away at his muscles and bones.

“Granger, what the fuck are you talking about? And give me back my wand!” Panic was starting to snake through him. None of this was supposed to be happening!

“You... you’re going to... leave it.” Her voice got softer as she spoke and he could see her mind working furiously behind her deep eyes. “Right? Draco?”

“We’re going to leave,” Draco clarified. “You said so. You said—”

“Oh my God.” Her eyes went wider than he had ever seen them. “*Oh my God*, you... you’re a Death Eater.”

Okay, he thought *he* was the one with a head injury, not her. Honestly, what in Salazar’s bloody name was happening tonight?

“I fucking told you!” Weasley yelled.

Draco took a step towards her, brows pulling together. “Granger, you know that—”

“You never wanted to... to change.” Her voice was oddly hollow.

“Change? What the fuck are you—”

Oh... shit.

She thought he was defecting. That’s why she had said she was proud of him. That he was — Oh *fuck!* Then she wasn’t planning on leaving with him. She hadn’t chosen him over Potter or Weasley and in fact, she was protecting that fucker with *his* wand right now.

No. No fucking way he was letting this happen.

“Give me back my wand, Granger.”

She shook her head, tears brimming in her eyes and her messy, just fucked curls falling around her face.

Draco glanced around and saw her lighter wand still beside the books. He dove for it and latched onto it like his life depended on it and hell, maybe it did because Weasley was more than willing to fight to stop him. That was fine, Draco didn’t plan on fighting fair anyways.

“Draco...” Granger’s said his name like a plea as he turned back around. “*Please...*”

A million shards of lightning struck his chest making it seize up tightly. It wouldn’t relax. He couldn’t breathe. Granger was looking at him so innocently, so sweetly, and in so much

pain.

His wand was trembling in her hand the same way his heart was in his chest. She had gone to Dumbledore and told him. She had never planned on leaving with him. Someone had poured ice water down his throat, down his spine. For one bright, beautiful moment he had everything he wanted and... he hadn't. She... she had only said she loved him because she thought he would turn.

If she knew what he had just done, she'd be cursing him right along with Weasley. Draco gripped her wand tighter. Hers felt... different and he wanted the familiarity of his hawthorn back. It knew him. This one... didn't. It wouldn't submit.

This couldn't be real. This couldn't be happening. He looked into her big doe eyes and shook his head in disbelief. He was losing her all over again and it felt... cold. It felt like dying.

No.

He wasn't about to lose *everything*, not when he was *so close*.

He shot a blood red stream of light at Weasley but somehow the fucker threw up a shield charm in just the nick of time. Fucking *felix felicitis* bullshit.

The curse shot off into one of the large stacks of rubbish, making a few things fall down, clattering loudly to the floor. Granger jumped out of the way of a dresser drawer and ran into Weasley. Her body pressed against his for a moment and Draco felt like he could spit venom.

He surged forward, reaching for her, but Weasley raised up his wand stopping Draco in his tracks. He glanced from Weasley to Granger; she looked so small and lost right now, like it wasn't just the drawer that was crashing down around her.

"Don't bother trying to convince him of anything, Hermione. He's a Death Eater. He's a purist. He's a *Malfoy*." Weasley said his name like it was sour.

"But— he doesn't want to be!" She turned her big chocolate eyes on him and Draco's brows pulled tight. "You don't have to do this. You don't have to be like them. Just—" she gulped down a breath and her eyes slid down his arm. "Give me my wand and we can—"

"This is the only way!" Draco shouted, panic starting to shoot through his limbs. Why couldn't she see that this mark, the curse it was, was also the *only* thing that could keep them safe?

"It's not, Draco. We can do this. *You* can do this." Her voice was soft and pleading. "Say it. Say you love me—"

He didn't want Weasley here for this and Draco bristled before he answered in a low voice, "You know I do."

"And you don't want that life anymore."

He felt like he hit an invisible wall. A wall separating him from Granger.

"Say it, Draco. I've always said what you needed to hear and this— this is what I need. Say you don't want to be a Death Eater anymore and the Order can help you. Say it. It's all I

want. You're all I want."

Draco blanched. Was she serious? He could keep them safe. He could keep them together. The Order would just get them killed.

"You don't know what you're asking of me," he said in a pained voice. Betraying his blood, his family... he had done all of this for them. After everything, *everything* he'd gone through, everything he'd done... Could he?

"See? He won't do it, Hermione." Weasley was standing right next to her. And this time Granger didn't move away. "You'll never be anything but a Mudblood to him."

Oh *fuck* him. Draco's anger rose up like poison, seeping into his bloodstream and soaking into his brain. Then Granger took a few steps closer to him and touched the hand holding her wand gently.

"I know you don't want this. I know *you*. Please, I'm *begging* you—" she gasped, as if it was too painful to speak.

The lightning struck in his chest, sending painful jolts into his heart and through his veins. She looked so small and fragile and he took a step forward, wanting to pull her into his arms and hold her and tell her it was all going to be okay and he would... he would do what he had to in order to keep her. Whatever he had to.

Is this what it would take? Betray his Master and turn Blood Traitor? He'd paint a larger target on his back than the one she had on hers. How could he protect her then?

But how could he not? Granger had *just* come back to him, he couldn't lose her again. *Wouldn't* lose her again. He had said he wouldn't hurt her this time. Draco looked deep into her big doe eyes. He wasn't going to. He wasn't going to let *anything* happen to her, no matter what it took.

"Granger, I—"

"Draaaco..." A scratchy voice echoed from one of the paths around them. Everything stopped. Time. His heart. The world. It all froze and then all moved too quickly for Draco to do anything to stop it.

"Who's that?" Granger asked breathlessly.

Goddamn it. He should have known she wouldn't wait. He should have known that his mental aunt would have been too excited at the prospect of raiding the school to not rush in as soon as she got the note telling her that he was ready and wanted to accept her offer to help.

He had called on her because he knew he couldn't do it on his own and that Bellatrix wouldn't let him back out. But she was supposed to have *goddamn waited* until he gave her the all clear once it was after hours. All of that felt like a lifetime ago. Like it was a different person who had done that.

But it wasn't. It was him. But she had changed everything for him. She had brought light into his dark world and without it, without her, he had gotten more lost than he had ever been before. But she was here now, standing in front of him and he wanted nothing more than to grab her hand and run with her. Out of the darkness and into her light.

Draco hardened his expression into a mask, trying to hide the maelstrom raging inside him. “Go.”

“What?” she squeaked.

Bellatrix couldn’t find her here, not Granger. He knew the horrors his aunt was capable of and he was *not* going to let that happen to his girl. He had said he would do anything in his power to make this up to her and he would. Anything. Everything.

“Go with Weasley.” The words tasted bitter and foul in his mouth.

“Draco—”

He pushed her back towards Weasley, shoving her hard into him. It didn’t take any time for Weasley to reach out a lanky arm and grab her to start pulling her away. Draco’s blood was poison in his veins as he looked into her large innocent eyes, so beautiful, so pure. And he wasn’t. He was branded and scarred by dark magic and there was no hiding or getting rid of it now. No matter how much he might want to.

Bellatrix’s voice rang out again, singing his name playfully.

“Where’s your nephew, Bella? I thought you said he was waiting on us.” He didn’t know the voice, but it had the familiar aristocratic drawl he had grown up hearing.

Then a deeper, gruffer voice spoke. “I think I can smell something over this way.”

Fuck, he knew that one. Fenrir was here too. Granger had never been in more danger in her life. She had to get out of here, *now*.

Granger looked down the rubble-strewn path and then turning back around to him with trepidation growing in her eyes as the rest of her face paled.

“You bastard.” Weasley at least had the decency to have stopped shouting. ‘Here?!’ he fiercely whispered. “You brought them *here*?!”

“Draco... *what have you done?*”

Granger was breathing fast, her chest rising and falling as she slowly shook her head as if somehow, something was going to change. But he could slowly see the disillusionment seep into her chocolate brown eyes as the hope faded from it. Draco swallowed, unable to say or do anything to stop it.

“You promised...” she whispered, voice breaking. “You didn’t mean it did you? You were never going to...”

Draco felt like his bones were cracking inside of him as his body and his mind went to war. “Granger, I’m sorry! It was before! I... I’ll fix this. I’ll fix all of this. Just go. Run. Hide. I’ll come for you.”

Granger glanced over her shoulder at the path leading towards them, coffee curls trembling. She turned back and took a step towards him. Draco could hear Bellatrix laughing and the sound of objects clattering and breaking. Weasley grabbed onto her hand again to pull her back. Draco made no move to stop him.

He let his cold gaze rest on Weasley’s for a moment. “Take her.”

He cast his eyes down, unable to stand the look in her eyes any longer. He had never hated himself more.

Ron pushed the door open quickly and he and Hermione spilled out from the Room of Requirement. The sun had gone down long ago and the torches only offered small pools of flickering orange light against the inky darkness that hung heavily from every corner and crevice of the corridor.

Hermione's lungs weren't working properly. She breathed in deep, heavy breaths of cool night air, but none of it was working to clear the swirling, storming cloud of confusion churned up by her rushing thoughts.

Draco let Death Eaters in. Draco let Death Eaters in. Draco was a Death Eater. Draco was a liar. Draco was...

"Hermione, we need to go. We have to tell someone—"

"Wait—" She looked back at the door, but it had already changed into a cold, grey wall again.

"You aren't serious," Ron's face fell. "Hermione, he's *one of them*."

"He's..." *Not. A Death Eater. A liar. Draco.*

"Have you lost your mind?!" Ron was shouting again. The lion in her chest growled. He was always shouting at her now. Ron spun her around, blue eyes wild as they searched her face for any hint of reason.

Hermione glared back at him. He didn't understand. He didn't *want* to understand. He just wanted to see Draco as a Death Eater and... and he was. Good Godric, he *was*. Her insides clenched tightly and she looked up at the high ceiling above her as if some answer was going to come down and explain everything was just a big misunderstanding and Draco was going to walk through the door and take her in his arms again and it was going to be like before.

She blinked slowly, her lashes brushing against the tops of her cheeks.

The ceiling remained cast in murky shadows.

"You've got to wake up from whatever he has you under. Hermione," Ron grabbed her shoulders tightly. "I need you with me."

"I'm not under any spell or taken any potions, Ron!" she said, exasperated. "I know this is hard for you to understand right now, but—"

"So, you... wanted to? You let him—" Ron's expression shifted into one of confused disgust. "You were mad that I kissed another girl so you *fucked* Malfoy?!"

"This isn't about you!" Hermione yelled back. Ron blinked in surprise. "I'm sorry you found out that way, I really am, but this isn't because of you. *I* made this choice because *I* wanted—"

“How could you?! You *know* who he is, what he is. After everything he’s done! To me and Harry and... Hagrid and Neville and *everyone*! He called you Mudblood for years and you still—” Ron was fuming, shaking his head making the torchlight dance across his fiery red hair. “I thought you were better than that.”

She had always known Ron would never understand, but that didn’t help any with the feelings of complete helplessness she was lost in right now. “Ron it wasn’t—” She tried to find the right words, but failed.

“Serious?” he sneered. “Yeah, I’d fucking say so. After all, he wanted you gone as soon as his *real* friends showed up.”

“Stop.” Her voice shook with that one word. Ron was being incredibly harsh, but he wasn’t as far away from the truth as she would have liked. Everything was crashing down and she hadn’t even had any time to pick up the pieces.

“He doesn’t love you.”

Hermione closed her eyes tightly.

“He was lying to you. He was *using* you.”

“Please.”

“Hermione,” Ron took her hand in his and she opened her eyes to see him looking at her with unexpected concern on his freckled face. “He’s a Death Eater.”

That was the truth. That was real. She could go back and forth on everything else, but Draco was, and always had been, a Death Eater.

“I— I know.” She cast her eyes down.

“It might not have been magic, but it wasn’t real. Hermione, it *wasn’t real*.”

Ron pulled her into a strong hug, wrapping his arms around her tightly before pulling back and resting his hands on her upper arms. This small, but comforting gesture was almost more than she could bear. She felt so alone right now; Draco had... had done what he did and how could they ever be together now and Ron knew everything and he was so mad at her but then he was also here with her and Draco was in there with *them* and—

“You’re my best friend and I need you for this. Are you with me?”

Her chest shattered into tiny fragments, slicing up everything in her on their way down.

Her eyes fluttered and she let out a weak breath. “Yes.”

Ron pulled the Map from his pocket. “McGonagall is on the third floor. Let’s go.”

They rushed through the castle, Ron leading her on as they jumped down stairs and ran along corridors. The shadows seemed longer tonight for some reason, broken up by flaring torches of burning light. Hermione was trying to piece everything back together, but it was all so broken. Draco wasn’t a cold blooded killer, she knew that. He hadn’t even wanted to take the mark and his attempts on Dumbledore’s life had been half-hearted; probably more to cover up the fact that he didn’t want to do it than to actually try and kill their Headmaster. He

had been so happy with her tonight and smiling and his eyes had shone so bright when he told her he loved her again.

Then why had he done this? If he really loved her he wouldn't have brought Death Eaters into the school. He wouldn't be trying to kill Dumbledore. If he loved her, he'd be with her right now. But he wasn't. He had told her to go so he could join in with the other Death Eaters.

"Professor!" Ron shouted and Hermione saw Professor McGonagall at the end of the hall.

"Mr. Weasley!" she said, surprised to see him and Hermione rushing towards her. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Death Eaters—" Ron gulped down a breath and glanced over at her quickly. "In the castle. There's Death Eaters in the castle."

Hermione had never seen Professor McGonagall unnerved like this before and it scared her.

"What? Where?" she asked quickly.

"Seventh floor." Ron stood up straighter and gripped his wand tightly.

Hermione could practically feel the tension coming off of Professor McGonagall. "As quickly as you can, tell me what's happened."

Ron recapped efficiently, leaving out the Map, the *felix*, and finding Hermione and Draco together. He said they were patrolling and heard them in the Room of Requirement, trying to find a way in. Hermione sent up a silent prayer of thanks. She knew he must hate her right now, but he was protecting her, and by extension, Draco too.

Hermione glanced over at him and bit her lip. Why?

"I know Harry and Dumbledore have left. Is there any way you can get word to them?"

Professor McGonagall blinked once and Hermione was sure she was wondering how Ron knew all this, but then she gave a quick shake of her head. "No. But there are members of the Order here tonight in the Headmaster's absence. Remus, Tonks, and your brother, Bill."

"Bill's here?" Ron asked, his voice taking on a nervous edge.

"Yes. How many Death Eaters have arrived?"

"I'm not sure exactly, but I heard at least three—" he glanced over at her then turned back to McGonagall. "Four different voices. I would assume more though, don't they normally attack in groups of seven?"

Hermione tensed, readying to hear his name, but again Ron left Draco out. His expression was tight and set. The *felix*. The *felix* must have been prompting him to hold his tongue. What other reason was there?

"Y-yes," Professor McGonagall blinked in surprise. "That's right."

"Then you'll need more fighters."

"You are students—"

“We’re all you’ve got.”

Both McGonagall and Hermione were taken aback at Ron’s sudden burst of confidence and assertiveness. Hermione knew he had taken the liquid luck, but instead of making him foolhardy, it seemed to be making Ron more... Ron. Like how he had been playing chess below the castle in their first year or how he had guided her through the Department of Mysteries. Decisive and direct.

“Hermione and I want to fight. We were in the D.A., we’re Prefects, and we’ve been at Harry’s side for years. He told us to help tonight and he’s taking his orders from Dumbledore. I’m sorry Professor, but we’re not going to run and hide.”

“Ron’s right,” Hermione finally found her voice. “We are both of age now and you’re not in any position to turn down help. This could be it, Professor, this could be the start of the war.”

“Very well,” Professor McGonagall relented. “But I want you in only an auxiliary capacity. Clear the halls, tell anyone you see still out to get back to their common rooms immediately. Alert any staff or ghosts you see along the way, but do not cause panic. Tell the other prefects to stay in their common rooms and look after the students there.”

“The Library,” Hermione said quickly and they both looked at her. “It’s full of fifth years studying for their O.W.L.s.”

“Yes, Miss Granger, thank you.” McGonagall nodded and pulled out her wand. “If they are on the seventh floor we will try and keep them there, blockade it. If they get past us, I want you out of the way. You are students, not members of the Order and therefore will return to Gryffindor Tower once you are done.”

Ron did not answer, but only stood resolutely with his chin raised up and blue flames in his eyes.

“You’re not going to do that, are you Mr. Weasley?”

“No ma’am, I am not.”

Hermione bit her lip. Could she do it? Could she fight him? His dark wand sent a jolt into her palm. Draco had said he was going to fix this. Maybe... maybe he wasn’t siding with them? He told her to run and hide, but she was a Gryffindor and that wasn’t an option for her, especially not if he needed her.

“We— we’re going to fight whether you want us to or not.” She held McGonagall’s gaze steadily. “We’re not going to abandon our school or our—” she glanced at Ron who was watching her carefully. “Friends.”

McGonagall sighed and pursed her lips. “I don’t have time to argue, you know the risks. I’m counting on you to help keep Hogwarts safe.”

McGonagall hurried away and Hermione felt a strange sinking feeling in her as she watched the older witch disappear from view. She had faced Death Eaters before, but this felt different. Maybe because she might look up to see shining silver eyes in a metal mask. How was this actually happening?

Hermione took a deep breath.

"Are you okay?" Ron asked, his voice deep and soft.

"No." Her voice shook. She was many things right now but *okay* was not one of them.

"I know I was harsh. I'm sorry."

"Everyone's sorry, but no one is willing to change because of it."

Ron paused for a moment. "I have though. Not having you as my friend when I was with Lavender changed things for me. Made me... see you differently. I don't want to lose you. But, seeing you tonight..."

"Made you hate me," she added bitterly. She knew it was coming. Might as well face it now.

"I don't hate you," he said, a bit of red creeping behind his freckles. "I'm not happy with you and I don't understand..." his red brows furrowed together. "Why— why *him*?"

Her throat was closing up. "Ron—"

"You know what? I don't want to know. I don't want to think about him and you and what he—" He stopped talking suddenly as his face flushed scarlet.

Hermione felt the blood drain from hers. Ron hadn't just found out, he had found them. In bed. How long had he been there? What had he heard? *Seen*?

"Why didn't you tell McGonagall about D-Draco?" She whispered his name.

Ron looked down at her, blue eyes strangely dark. "Because he needs to pay for what he did. And I want to be the one to do it."

Hermione's mouth fell open in horror. Ron had already tried to curse him with *Sectumsempra* tonight. The image of Draco's jagged white scars flashed in her mind quickly followed by the memory of his deathly pale face in the hospital wing. She didn't want to think about what would happen if Ron turned his wand on Draco again. And if Draco went after him, he'd be using *her* wand to do it.

"We can talk about this later. Right now we need to get to the Library." Ron looked away from her. Something had changed between them, she just wasn't sure what. "Ginny's in there."

"You're not supposed to be here," Draco threw up a tall, white mental wall, blocking out the image of Granger's cinnamon eyes looking back at him as Weasley pulled her away. His chest contracted painfully.

Bellatrix pouted her thick lips. "You invited us to a party. And I want to play."

He fought the revulsion churning in him as she grinned her mottled teeth, flicking her tongue in between them. Fenrir loped behind her along with Rowle whose large frame was taking up half of the pathway alone. Draco could see his uncle Rabastan under a dark hood and two other Death Eaters already masked. He had thought it would be just Bellatrix, maybe Rodolphus. He hadn't expected her to bring a squad of them.

“He’s not here. Dumbledore’s not even here,” Draco said quickly. He had to get them out and fast. He had to fix this. For her. Anything for her.

“What do you mean not here?” Bellatrix’s playful tone dropped. “You said—”

“I said to wait!” Draco snapped, feeling his blood move quickly into each of his fingers, twitching around the handle of... Granger’s wand. He still had Granger’s wand. He held it tighter, wishing it was her. He took three quick breaths and pulled himself back under control. “I said to wait until I gave the word—”

“Don’t take orders from pretty boys like you,” Fenrir growled, pushing past Bellatrix and looking around. ‘Where the bloody hell are we anyways? Anyone else here?’ He sniffed the air. “I smell something... *sweet*.”

Granger.

“No. No one else is here.” He slammed more mental walls in place, keeping her safe behind them and made his face a mask, refusing to look over at the ruined bed beside him. “Now go back, I’ll let you know when—”

“Backing out?” Fenrir chuckled. “*Pussy*.”

Draco felt dark anger rearing up in him again and Granger’s wand rebelled against his hand.

“He’s not backing out of anything,” Bellatrix snipped. ‘I trained him myself! Draco is going to bring honor back to his family, *my* family!’ She turned back to Draco, reaching out and patting his cheek. Her long nails were split and peeling. “Aren’t you, Draco? Going to make Mummy and Daddy proud?”

Granger had been proud of him. He swallowed the bile rising in his throat at his aunt’s touch and raised his chin up out of her reach.

“I told you, it’s not time yet. Now *leave* before someone finds out you’re here.”

“What’s this?” Rabastan leaned down and picked up... fuck. He picked up Granger’s light pink bra, holding the strap on a single finger. Draco’s whole body hardened like he was made out of stone. Rabastan smirked as he looked over at Draco. “Looks like you started the party without us.”

Draco whipped her wand through the air, summoning the bra into his hand where he quickly pocketed it. He didn’t want Rabastan’s hands on it. He knew what kind of man his uncle was. Fenrir gave a low wolf whistle as Draco sneered nastily at them. Her wand had pulled against him, but he held it firmly. Two pieces. He had two pieces of her now. And he would get the rest back too.

Rabastan gave a dark laugh. “So that’s why you want us gone so bad. Got yourself a little girlfriend and not ready to leave her behind, eh? Just like your father back when we were in school. Remember, Bella? He was all over—”

“Shut up,” Bellatrix hissed.

Rabastan ignored her and kicked over the dresser drawer as if he was expecting to find someone under it. “Don’t worry, son, there will be plenty of cunt waiting for you once you’ve

—”

“I’m not your *son*,” Draco snarled.

“That’s right,” Bellatrix said slyly and turned back towards him. “*Your* daddy is counting on you. Ready to get him out?”

“I told you,” Draco said, trying to keep his hands from shaking. He hated that they were talking about his father. Hated that it was his father’s fault he was in this mess and had this bloody mark on his arm that made him one of them. He hated it. He hated him. He hated *them*. It surged through him, sickly hot like a fever. He wanted them gone. Gone from here, gone from his life. “Dumbledore’s not here—”

“But we can get him here,” Bellatrix smiled sweetly, baring her stained teeth. “Set off the Dark Mark above the school and Dumby will come running from wherever he’s scampered off to.”

Draco’s heart was pounding in his chest. They weren’t leaving. They had come for a reason and they weren’t leaving until it was done. He couldn’t fight them all. He couldn’t outrun them either. If he tried to do anything but what they wanted him to do they would turn on him and probably break out anyways. He had to fix this, but how?

His flame of hope of a new life with Granger was extinguished as reality crashed over him like a stormy wave. He had said anything. He had said everything.

And that’s what he’d do. He’d damn himself if it meant saving her.

He looked deep into the black pits of Bellatrix’s maddened eyes. Her smile faded as a ornately carved silver mask slid over her face. “Time to make your bones.”

Hermione dodged out of the way as a jet of light shot past her. The corridor was alight with curses and hexes, hitting shielding spells, walls, and every now and then a body. Hermione’s arms were burned where curses and jinxes had brushed over her. One Death Eater was down, taken out by a curse that had rebounded off of a wall and quickly crumpling to the floor in a heap not to be moved.

It had taken too long to clear out the Library. Ron was yelling at a group of Ravenclaws who refused to be moved when Hermione sought out Madam Pince, urgently explaining what was happening and she ushered everyone left into the Restricted Section, locking the gate behind her.

“Move back, out of sight, but touch *nothing!*” she screeched at the mass of students huddling under the faint blue candles. Hermione glanced into dark stacks a second longer before following Ron back out into the corridor. Ginny, Luna, and Neville were already waiting for them.

“What are you doing here?” Ron yelled. “I told you to get back to the common room!”

“Like HELL!” Ginny shouted back, sticking her face in Ron’s and balling her hands into fists at her side.

“It’s not safe out here—”

“FUCK SAFE!”

Hermione’s eyes darted nervously between them. Ginny was just as obstinate as Ron and Hermione couldn’t see any way they were going to convince her to stay out of this one.

“I’m not letting those Death Eaters be Harry’s welcoming party when he gets back. You can’t stop me, Ron, so don’t even *try*.” She tossed her coppery hair back over her shoulders and squared them.

“If they really are Death Eaters here, then I’m fighting,” Neville said, pulling his wand out of his pocket. “You can’t tell me what to do and don’t even try and think about jinxing me this time, Hermione.”

Hermione tucked Draco’s wand behind her thigh. She didn’t want anyone to see the dark piece of hawthorn wood in her hand and start to ask questions. “McGonagall doesn’t want —”

“We’re part of Dumbledore’s Army too,” Luna said, blinking her dreamy eyes. “We have as much right as you do to stand up for what we believe in.”

Ron glanced over them quickly, his eyes resting a second longer on Hermione, clear and blue but... worried.

“Fine, but all of you take some of this.” He pulled out the vial of *felix felicitis* from his pocket and passed it to Ginny. When Luna handed it to Hermione, she lifted it to her lips, but with a wild thought she kept them closed, only pretending to drink the last few drops that were in the vial. Godric knew what tonight held in store for them and someone might need a little bit of extra luck.

They were running along the seventh floor corridor when Nearly Headless Nick told them the Order was in the hall outside the Astronomy tower and Ron led them off again. It wasn’t long before the sound of shouting, spells, and screams filled the air and Hermione froze as she looked at the scene in front of her.

“Bill!” Ron shouted and dove into the madness. Hermione cast a shield charm around herself as a jet of light came towards her and then lost sight of Ron in the fray.

There was a large Death Eater spouting off curse after curse, throwing them wildly around him and creating a sphere of chaos in the hallway. A painting exploded off of the wall and went crashing to the floor. Luna was sending off strange lilac sparks she didn’t recognize as any known spell, teaming up with Tonks as they faced off against a masked Death Eater with thick dark hair around a cold mask. Ginny was trying to sneak up to the large Death Eater; every spell was just barely missing her. When she got close enough she took aim, but one of the spells hit the wall next to her, sending shards of stone raining down around her.

Hermione dashed forward, but stopped short when she saw black curly hair bouncing up the stairs on the far end of the hall, heading to the top of the Astronomy tower. Neville was chasing after Bellatrix, a furious expression on his face. Then suddenly he was thrown back like he had hit an invisible wall and his body slid along the dust-covered floor, displacing a few chunks of stone. He did not move.

Her heart was thundering in her chest and she shot off a few defensive spells and ducked behind a large stone brazier that had gone out. Draco's wand functioned surprisingly well. It hadn't submitted to her, but it worked for her, with her. It seemed to almost *liked* being used, as if it was happy about it. Every time she sent a spell flying she could feel it pushing for more, stronger, magic to run through it. It was powerful, but needed a steady hand to wield it. It needed control.

She looked around the hallway, but couldn't see Draco's pale blond hair at all. Maybe he wasn't here? Her heart bloomed. Maybe he refused to fight with them or... or maybe something had happened to him in the Room of Requirement. Oh no... *please*.

Had he tried to fix this? What had he even meant by that? Obviously whatever he had tried to do hadn't worked because the Death Eaters were here and... and he wasn't. She glanced around the brazier to see if she could get any hint of what might have happened to him. One of the Death Eaters wasn't wearing a mask and his long face was covered in thick, dripping blood. Oh God... there was a body under him. It didn't have blond hair, *thank Godric*, but it did have... red. No...

He lifted his face up and sniffed the air and strikingly yellow eyes narrowed in her direction. He had seen her. Hermione aimed her wand and sent a non-verbal stunning spell at him, but he jumped to the side with long loping legs and tilted his head as if she was something interesting.

He took a step in her direction, smiling an awful, bloody smile. Her hand was steady when she raised Draco's wand again.

"Sweet..." he growled.

Then he was blasted backwards towards the stairs and Lupin stepped in front of her.

"How's that for sweet?" he snarled, looking almost feral in his fury. It wasn't a full moon, but Hermione recognized a bit of his wolfishness come out in him as he faced off with the bloody Death Eater.

The Death Eater got to his feet, scrambling up the stairs and away from the battle. Lupin took off after him, but once he reached the third step, he was shoved back just like Neville had been.

The stairs... Hermione looked up at them. Whatever was going on was happening at the top of the stairs, at the top of the tower. But there was something stopping people from climbing them, some sort of barrier. Was there a password to get past it? She didn't have time to think about it any more as she threw up a quick shield charm to stop another wayward curse, Draco's wand buzzed happily with the use.

It was chaos. Complete chaos and it took all of Hermione's brainpower and skill to just stay afloat. She wasn't sure how long they had been fighting, but she had scratches on her hands from falling bits of stone and her hair was wild, falling into her face. As she reached up to push back a few unruly curls her eyes went wide at the sight in front of her.

Snape was running down the hall, black robes billowing behind him and Draco was right on his heels. She stopped breathing. Fallen locks of pale blond hair covered his forehead, sticking to it, but still stood out brightly against the deathly pale shade of his white skin. His

brows were pulled tight in deep concentration and his eyes were storming like a hurricane as they focused in on the opposite stairwell at the end of the hall.

He was with Snape, a member of the Order! Were they fighting together? Is what he meant about fixing this? But as she watched neither of them seemed to care much about the battle going on around them and only setting off spells they needed to in order to get people or rubble out of their way, her light colored wand held tightly in his large hand. But she noticed that no one was sending curses at them, not Order members and not Death Eaters. They all let them pass, let them through.

She leaned out from her protected spot behind the brazier, holding Draco's wand out in case she had to cast a shield charm. There was something different about Draco's expression, something... dark.

Something was wrong.

Draco paused as they reached the stairs and looked like he might turn back for a moment, but then Harry appeared, jumping down the last half dozen steps and into the hall, his face almost as white as Draco's. And Hermione's blood ran cold in her veins.

Harry had been with Dumbledore. Harry had been at the top of the tower. Draco had just come down from the tower. Snape had come down from the tower. Dumbledore had not come down from the tower. Certainly they would not have abandoned Dumbledore if there was still a fight up there and Harry looked *furios*.

They felt like different strains of thought instead of one cohesive one, but they were all rushing down every nerve ending in her body, chasing each other, racing, and not letting her think anything else. Draco. Harry. Dumbledore.

"SNAPE!" Harry bellowed and began to tear down the hall after him. Hermione met Ron's eye from the other end of the hall. He looked from her to Draco's poised form at the top of the stairs leading down into the castle and then back as Draco disappeared, following Snape down.

Hermione gripped his wand in her hand and stepped out from her protected spot.

"NO!" Ron shouted, but Hermione was already dashing towards the stairs. Her Gryffindor courage fired up, filling her with brazen recklessness as she dodged spells and jumped over a torch still burning on the ground.

She could hear someone behind her, but didn't stop to see if it was friend or foe. If it was an Order member then she didn't have to worry and if it was a Death Eater then she needed to keep moving anyways. It didn't matter. All that mattered was Draco. She had to get to Draco.

She slowed when she got to the fourth floor. There was no sign of anyone here and it was strangely quiet. Too quiet. She could hear her heartbeat in her ears and her quick breathing as she tried to catch her breath. Her arms and legs tightened like coiled springs in the suppressive silence.

"Draco?" His name echoed down the corridor, bouncing off of the walls.

Hermione took a few steps forward. A nervous tightness took hold of her and her blood felt too thick in her veins and her limbs moved too stiffly and her mind raced too quickly,

seeing shadows move where there was only— stillness. Empty. Nothing.

She was alone. Completely alone. And there were Death Eaters in the castle. It was like one of her nightmares come to life. Panic gripped her tight, warring with the boldness that had driven her down here and pumping adrenaline through her.

“Harry?” she called out a little softer and took a few more steps down the corridor. Her heart was in her throat when she tried again and whispered, “Draco?”

“Hello, Sweetheart.”

Large hands grabbed her and pushed her roughly, pulling back a tapestry and shoving her against the cold stone wall. Darkness surrounded her as the thick tapestry fell back and she looked up into shining silver eyes.

“*Thank Salazar,*” he breathed out and collected her quickly into his arms. They were strong and wrapped around her like she was made to fit in them. For the briefest moment everything else fell away and she breathed in his sweet mint and soft parchment scent, letting her body mold into his and oh God, it felt *so good*.

“Draco—” she gasped, wrapping her arms around him as well and feeling the strong muscles she had come to know tighten at her touch.

He grabbed her face, turning it up towards him and looked her over. His thumb brushed some dirt off of her cheek gently. “What are you doing here? It’s not safe! I told you to hide, I told you I’d come for you, but... you came to me, didn’t you?” Draco’s eyes shone. “That’s my girl.”

“Draco, what’s happened? You were on the tower with Harry and—”

“Shh, don’t worry about that,” he said in his low voice, relief relaxing his ashen face and letting a small smile pull on his lips. He brushed his fingers into her hair, running them through her curls. He pulled up her hand in his, kissing a few of the scratches on her skin. She saw a faint tint of red smear over his lips. “It’s over. It’s all over, Granger and—”

“What did you do?”

His eyes hardened slightly at her tone of voice. “You think I—”

“Where did Harry and Snape go? Where’s Dumbledore? Is he still on the tower?”

Draco blinked and in that small instant, his face carved into impassivity. “No.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes, trying to figure him out. It wasn’t a flat out lie, it was one of his special twists of truth. That didn’t make it any better. She pressed her fists against his chest, pushing him back a little and she saw him glance down at his wand in her hand, hunger gleaming in his grey eyes.

“Granger, I will tell you *everything*,” he said seriously as he turned them back up to her. ‘I swear on Salazar’s watery grave, but right now,’ he pulled the tapestry back a little and orange light pooled inside. “We have to *go*.”

Hermione planted her feet on the ground. “I’m not going anywhere until you tell me—”

“Dumbledore’s dead.”

The world stopped spinning, or maybe she was just spinning the opposite way? Hermione's legs started to give out from underneath her.

"Shit, Granger!" Draco's arms were around her again, holding her up. She could feel the pattern of her wand pressing in between her shoulder blades. "I've got you," his voice was as soft as velvet and Hermione wanted to sink down into it.

"I've got you," he repeated, softer this time. "I won't let you go."

"Stop—" she gasped, pressing her fists against him, trying to push him away, but she seemed to lose the strength in her arms.

Dumbledore. Dumbledore was dead. And Draco was on the tower and Dumbledore was on the tower, but Dumbledore wasn't there anymore and Draco was here and—

"Look at me." Draco was pulling on her face, trying to turn it up to him, but Hermione pulled it away, refusing to look at him, to acknowledge what he said was true. "Granger, look at me."

"No," she whimpered. "Draco, no. Stop."

"I can't," he pressed his head against hers. "It's too late for that now, but it's not too late for us." His hands tightened around her.

Not too late? After what he'd done? She had forgiven him for a lot of things, many of them she shouldn't have, but this... Something spiked up in her suddenly and violently and Hermione reacted instinctively. "STOP! Let GO of me!"

Her body bucked and fought against his hold, pushing them both back out from under the tapestry and into the corridor.

"Shit!" Draco stumbled back, obviously surprised by her quick movement. Hermione thought of the liquid luck in her pocket and now wished she had taken it when she had the chance. She quickly moved into the dueling stance Harry had shown her last year in the D.A. and raised up his dark wand in front of her.

"What did you do, Draco?" She put as much fortitude in her voice as she could and it still shook slightly.

He was still. So still he was more of a statue than a man. The only sign of life was the dark storming in his eyes. Slowly it spread over him like a shadow of a cloud. "I meant it when I said I'd do anything for you. I did what I had to. I did what I *could*."

She didn't want to hear this. She didn't want to think about what he'd done and she didn't like that he was naming her as the reason. Her eyes began to blur as a line of water gathered in them.

"It just wasn't enough."

What? She blinked to clear the water from her eyes.

"But I'm not going to let that happen to you."

Draco had her wand raised and pointed in between her eyes. Her breath and heart caught in her throat, choking her. She couldn't think, couldn't feel, couldn't do anything but look down

the end of her own wand turned against her. Her eyes went impossibly wide.

“Imperio.”

It felt like sinking into a cool pool of water on a hot summer day. All the little aches and pains from the battle upstairs faded. The scratches and cuts on her arms felt like nothing, like they weren't even there. A calming hazy mist floated through her mind and she felt herself floating along with it, accompanying, but not in control.

Come to me.

Hermione was moving. She was in his arms. Draco gave her a quick kiss on her forehead and she looked deep into his rain grey eyes, the only things that she could make come into focus. Her body shaking, fighting against the hold on it and something deep in her trying to break free, like a lion in a cage.

“You’ve got to relax. Just listen to my voice. Don’t be nervous.” It was the low, commanding tone he had often used with her. It was easy, so easy, to follow it. She knew that voice. She knew those words. Hermione nodded and saw him flash her a crooked smile. “Good girl.” *Come.*

It was hard to keep up with him. His legs were much longer than hers to start with and she kept missing steps, thinking the floor was going to be there when it wasn't or dragging her feet when she didn't pick them up high enough. Draco was practically gliding next to her, his arm wrapped around her, keeping her close to him. He moved them quickly, guiding them through passageways, staying off the main corridors and taking side stairs, keeping them out of sight.

“Draco...” her own voice sounded very far away and she wasn't sure she had actually spoken because a strangely long time seemed to pass before Draco answered her.

“Just a little farther, Sweetheart. They blocked the seventh floor so we’re just taking a detour. That’s all.”

Oh. Okay. Just a detour. That was fine. It felt fine. Everything felt... great, actually. It was like the feeling Draco normally gave her but magnified a hundred times. Hermione felt the cool mist swirl in her mind and breathed it in, letting it fill her. Mmm, minty.

“You’re doing so good,” Draco cooed. “My beautiful, brave girl.”

Tell me you love me.

Hermione spoke without thought, looking up into his grey eyes. “I love you.”

The lion in the cage roared and Draco made a happy humming noise deep in his throat.

They were outside. She could see the stars, sparkling like small white diamonds in the dark sky. They seemed farther away than usual though and Hermione almost tripped when it took her too long to look away from them.

“Careful, now. We’re almost there.” Draco’s arm was strong around her, pushing, pulling, and protecting her. “In fact,” he paused for a moment and plucked his wand from her fingers, which didn't try at all to hold onto it. He took his time, letting his hand travel over her body as he brought it back.

“What’s this?” he murmured and Hermione felt his long fingers dip into her pocket. She blinked and Draco was holding out the almost empty vial of *felix felicitis* in front of her. “Well, well, well... You know, winning this would have changed my life. But you did that for me instead.” He turned it upside down and she watched, mesmerized as the thick golden liquid fell in fat drops onto the ground.

“Don’t need luck anymore though.” He tilted her face up to his and swiftly brought his lips down on hers. Hermione barely had a chance to react before they were gone again. “I’ve got everything I need now.”

They moved on again. Draco was pulling her faster, harder, and the dark grounds seemed to move by her in a blur as they made their way across them. The night was unseasonably cool and Hermione felt the cold start to nip at her. She normally wore a jacket or a sweater, but tonight all she had was her thin t-shirt which didn’t do much against the chilly air. She huddled closer to Draco, but he seemed to almost be draining the warmth from her.

There were trees up ahead, tall and dark.

“Where...” she said softly.

“It’s going to be good, you’ll see,” Draco said in his velvet voice. ‘It will take some getting used to, but you’ll be happy. With me.’ He squeezed his arm around her. “Only me. That’s what you said you wanted, isn’t it? Only me? That you didn’t want to leave me? Now you never will.”

Yes, but not like this. She gasped in some of the cold night air, trying to clear her head, but Draco’s heavy fog rolled back in, shrouding it.

“I’m going to take care of you, protect you. I couldn’t save him, but I can save you. Keep you safe. I’m going to be so good to you, Granger. I’m going to treat you like you should be treated. I’m going to dress you like a queen and then fuck you like a slave.”

Hermione shivered in the cool air.

“You like that?” he chuckled. “I knew you would. I know everything you like because it’s what I like too. You’re perfect. *We’re* perfect. And now we’re going to be together.”

There was shouting in the distance and she felt Draco’s muscles tighten, his body almost too solid against her compared to the mist she was floating in.

“Granger.”

Stop.

One voice was in her head and the other in her ears. Hermione’s body halted so quickly she almost tumbled over. Draco held onto her like she was nothing, like she was everything.

“This way, pet.” *Left. Move.* “We need to get away from—”

“Draco!”

“*Fuck me,*” Draco muttered viciously.

“What are you doing? Get over here! The gate is—” The voice... she knew that scratchy voice, but couldn’t place it in the fog. “Who’s with you?”

The haze in her mind swirled thickly as Draco turned them around. Hermione leaned heavily into him, pressing her cheek into his chest. His tall frame and strong arm were the only things keeping her upright. There was something in the sky... moving... slithering...

“Drac— Draco,” she breathed out his name.

“Hush.” *Quiet.*

The fuzzy outline was coming into view; twisting... curly. “Draco,” the scratch voice said softly in an impressed whisper. “Did you catch one? An Order member? *Well done!*”

Draco’s body was as hard and cold as marble against her. The figure was getting closer and the lion started to roar, pacing in its cage as the cool mist in her mind swirled thickly. Draco leaned down, pressing his mouth against her ear and hissed. “Listen to me carefully, Granger and do exactly as I say. Stay down. Stay quiet. Stay *safe*. I will come for you.”

I will come for you, Hermione, I promise.

She felt something slide into her back pocket, thin and hard. Her wand. He was giving her back her wand.

As soon as his fingers left it, he shoved her roughly away from him. She landed hard in a wet puddle, mud splashing up over her hands, arms, and face. She sucked in a large breath and the fog in her mind rolled back.

Her lungs filled with the cold night air and it was *cold*. Much colder than she realized and her now wet clothes weren’t helping. Everything was swirling around in her brain as it all came back too fast and too jumbled for her to make sense of it. As she gained control over her body again, every scrape, cut, and burn flared to life. Hermione winced sharply, her wrist— oh God, her *wrist*. It was shooting pain up her arm and she looked down to see it bent strangely under her.

Her vision swam and then everything came into sharp relief. Draco was standing over her, Bellatrix was a few yards away, and the Dark Mark was hovering in the sky overhead. Hermione’s eyes went wide watching it. The serpent was slithering through the clouds as if it was trying to reach the top of the Astronomy tower.

“No,” Draco growled and his voice jolted something in her. He was standing over her, towering menacingly. ‘She’s *nothing*,’ he spat. “Nothing but a filthy Mudblood.”

He slammed his boot down in the puddle, splashing mud over her and onto her face. Bellatrix laughed wildly, throwing her head back and her curly hair fell shaking down her back. Draco lifted his boot and pressed it into her chest, pushing her back until her curls were soaked in the cold, dirty water.

Draco sneered down at her, grey eyes gleaming with malice as he pushed her down. “Not fit to lick my boots.”

The pain in her body was nothing compared to the cracking in her chest as her heart splintered and shattered. What was he doing? Why was he saying this?

Bellatrix was jumping up and down gleefully and clapping her hands. Hermione was gasping for breath, Draco’s boot pressing heavily into her chest. His eyes were as hard as

granite, but for just a moment, barely half a second, they flashed with as much pain as she herself was feeling.

“Bella! Draco!” Hermione’s head turned slightly as another dark robed figure appeared in the distance. “They’re on us! Move!” The dark haired wizard shot a spell over his shoulder and then started off running again.

“Draco,” Hermione gasped, trying to fill her chest. “Don’t... don’t *do this*.”

“Listen to her beg!” Bellatrix cackled. “Make her do it again!”

“Shut up!” Draco barked, his eyes like iron. “Shut your *mouth*.”

He lifted his boot and Hermione tried to breathe, but her chest was bruised from his weight.

“Need me to show you how it’s done?” Bellatrix skipped a little closer.

“NO!” Draco shouted, rounding on her. ‘No,’ he said a little more calmly, stepping in front of Hermione again, blocking Bellatrix. “I already had one quarry taken away from me. This one is *mine*.”

Bellatrix’s face broke into a wide smile, showing off rows of rotten teeth.

Hermione turned back to Draco, his face a blank marble mask, but his silver eyes shone brightly against the dark night around him. He pointed his wand down at her and Hermione felt another crack in her chest, breaking her heart.

“You...” her voice shook with emotion. “You said you w-wouldn’t hu-hurt me.”

Draco’s lip curled over his straight white teeth and then gave her a knowing smirk. “I lied.”

Hermione took a fistful of mud and flung it at him, hitting him in the face. It splattered across his white face, marking him with the same filth she was drenched in.

“Draco! Now!” Bellatrix called from the path and Hermione heard shouting coming from the direction of the school.

Draco wiped the mud off his face and leaned down over her, silver eyes shining strangely for a moment before he said, “This isn’t over.”

A blast of light hit her chest. Hermione was knocked back into the mud and water again.

She opened her eyes and saw his boots moving across the grass quickly. Bellatrix threw her arms around his neck and planted a smacking kiss on his cheek in a parody of a loving gesture before guiding him off with her.

“The Dark Lord will be pleased with what you accomplished here. Not the original plan, but resourcefulness is a fine quality. One of the many that the Dark Lord possesses himself!”

She pushed herself up, closing her eyes tightly and bracing herself against the pain in her wrist. Gasping loudly she made it up and opened her eyes but... Draco was gone. Disappeared into the dark night.

She staggered forward, chest aching and sore from his boot or maybe whatever spell he had knocked her back with. Making it to the path to the school gates Hermione saw Hagrid's hut billowing white smoke and beyond that, people were starting to gather around the outside of the school. She looked down the path to where the school gates led out onto the road to Hogsmeade.

The grounds were dark and quiet. They were gone. He was gone.

Hermione wrapped her arms around herself, trying to keep her body in one piece as it broke apart. She was on her knees, muddy water dripping from her curls as she cradled her wrist against her chest.

"HERMIONE!"

Arms wrapped around her, almost knocking her over. "Shit, Hermione, is that you under there?" Hands pushed back muddy curls and wiped the dirt from her face.

Harry. Harry was here and holding her and she was collapsing in on herself. He held onto her, his own hands shaking on her shoulders and she could feel him breathing heavily, painfully. He had lost Dumbledore tonight. He had lost the closest thing he had to a guardian because— because of Draco.

Because she had taken too long to tell someone about him and she had believed him when he said he changed because it was what *she* wanted. It was what she wanted more than *anything* so she had been willing to believe anything he told her, anything he wanted her to. And she had let him. She had let him lie to her.

"Harry, I'm so sorry!" she sobbed. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry." She repeated it over and over. She repeated it until the words ran together, until they didn't make sense anymore. Until they were taken over by the sobs that already had hold over her broken body.

Hot rays of burning daylight streamed down on Hermione as she made her way with Ron, Harry, and Ginny down to the Lake for Dumbledore's funeral. It was slow going as the crowd coming from the castle was large and already the seats were beginning to fill up. Ginny was holding tightly onto Harry's hand, offering him a small bit of comfort. Hermione's heart went out to him. Harry had known so much pain and loss in his life and every year it only seemed to grow heavier on him. She knew he took every death in his life as a personal responsibility and Dumbledore's was no different. Although he wasn't the one who was responsible for that.

Hermione felt guilty when she heard that it was Snape who had done the deed and not Draco and a sudden rush of relief washed over her, leaving her gasping in disbelief. He hadn't done it. He hadn't killed him. But not for lack of trying. And Dumbledore would still be here right now if he hadn't brought the Death Eaters that night. He might not be a murderer, but he was far from blameless. Then again, so was she.

It seemed that most of the wizarding community in Britain had come to pay their respects not to mention magical creatures like the merpeople and centaurs had gathered, singing their songs and giving arrows in salute to a life well lived; a life that should not have ended so soon. A wizard in black robes stood at the front of the crowd that had amassed and began speaking. From their seats in the back it was hard to hear, but Hermione didn't mind missing

out on the speech about what a great man and wizard Dumbledore was. Her own thoughts and feelings ran much deeper than the list of achievements they were surely reading out at the moment.

Dumbledore had sat across the desk from her and told her how he believed in Draco, how he thought he could be saved and only needed a second chance in order to prove himself. Dumbledore's belief in Draco and helped Hermione come to terms with her feelings for him and gave her the courage to go to him, tell him the truth and try to... try to save him from a fate he had never wanted to be saved from.

The events of that night haunted her. The memories while she was under his control were a little hazy, but they were slowly coming all back. He had used an unforgivable curse on her, something she never thought him capable of. It made no sense for him to do that and then turn around and shove her away so easily. That was until she stepped back and looked at it as a whole instead of separate pieces.

She had always thought there was Draco and there was Malfoy. But that wasn't exactly true. He was both. He was a Death Eater and he was in love with her. And he had somehow interwoven those two parts of himself together, maybe to keep himself from coming apart entirely. By his own admission he was not a very good Death Eater, but Draco was the perfect example of a Slytherin. Sly, cunning, and determined to achieve his goals by any means. And what he had wanted was her.

She did believe Draco loved her, but it was *how* he loved her that was the problem. He loved her possessively, selfishly, and unflinchingly. So much that he convinced himself that it was acceptable to take her will away in order to keep her with him. He had told her, at the very start, that there were things he needed, wanted. And she had thought she understood, but she had no idea. None. Until now.

The look in his rain grey eyes as he laid on top of her in the white bed, melding their bodies into one and telling her how he loved her would not fade from her mind. It mixed with the cold, cruel granite that he had glared down at her and dug the heel of his boot into her chest, pushing her down into the mud. Keeping her down. Keeping her safe.

At least in his mind.

"He is a powerful young man, but terribly misguided. I believe that he thinks he is doing the right thing."

That's what Dumbledore had said about Draco and as always, he had been right. She looked out over the bright grounds, the summer sun shining down mercilessly, glistening on the cool waters of the lake. She hadn't slept at all last night, half afraid that he would be waiting there in her dreams for her again. Instead she had sat there and thought about everything he had said, everything he had done.

It had been for her. He had pushed her, called her names, and hurt her to save her. Bellatrix would have done much worse if she had known who Draco had been smuggling out of the castle. Where had he been taking her anyways? He had tried to keep her away from the Death Eaters too. Could it be that he had planned on leaving them after all? But then he could have just stayed with her in the castle. The Order would have... but no. He had many chances to

turn back and all he had ever done was go deeper into the darkness. And this time he had tried to take her down with him.

Hermione blinked away tears that were forming in her eyes. Maybe she was wrong about him. Maybe it had been more lies. It didn't *feel* like lies though, but... after everything, could she be sure of anything anymore? Dumbledore had trusted Snape and was lying dead on the white marble table because of it. She felt the tears slip down over her cheeks. Dumbledore—who believed in Draco, who trusted Snape, who had always helped Harry, was dead. Gone. And like Draco, he wasn't coming back either.

White flames engulfed the marble table where his body lay and Hermione jumped in surprise. Ron shifted beside her and she thought she saw his hand move like it was going to take hers, but then it stopped and curled into a fist, pressing into his leg.

When she and Harry had made it back up to the school Ron had been there waiting on them in the hospital wing around Bill's bed. He rushed forward and roughly hugged Harry before turning to her and taking a second before he pulled her too into his arms. Hermione closed her eyes tightly as she held him back. Just so glad that he was alright and everyone had luckily made it through. She didn't think she could stand it to lose anyone else.

They rejoined the Order members around Bill's bed as Harry and Lupin talked about Snape and Dumbledore and... Draco. Ron had sat beside her, silent but not sullen. At first she had been afraid that he might say something, mention her and Draco, but he just stared ahead, brows heavy over tired eyes. She caught him looking at her only once, but the torn, troubled look in his blue eyes had been enough. He looked away and sighed, stretching his legs out and then glanced back at her, giving her the saddest, smallest smile she had ever seen. At least he didn't hate her for what she had done. Maybe Ron had changed or grown over this year because he had never been the forgiving type. But with the war looming over their heads it put everything into perspective.

She glanced at Ron who was staring resolutely ahead and bit her lip before looking down the row. Harry, Ginny, Neville, Luna; this was her family now. Maybe not the one she was born into, but hers all the same. She hadn't been born into the magical world either, but she wasn't going to let anyone take it from her just like she wasn't going to lose anyone else she loved. Not if she could help it.

The flames burned out and it was over. Dumbledore's body was encased in a pristine white tomb and sealed away against time. Slowly they stood up and people began to file out of their seats, heading back up to the castle or towards the drive towards Hogsmeade. Hermione wiped her eyes with one of her hands and looked over to see Harry with his head bent low to Ginny, talking softly.

"Come on," Ron murmured. "Let's give them a moment."

They moved a little ways off from Harry and Ginny and Hermione looked back up at the castle, her eyes tracing the tall stretch up to the Astronomy tower. What had happened there? Harry had said very little about what occurred, just that Draco had disarmed Dumbledore, other Death Eaters had arrived, and then Snape had killed him. She wanted to ask more, *needed* to know what Draco had said or done on the tower, but it wasn't the time. Harry was still grieving and she did not want to cause him any more pain by making him relive Dumbledore's death.

“Are you okay?” Ron asked as they walked over the thick grass of the Hogwarts grounds.

She nodded. “I think so. It’s just a lot. How are you doing?”

Ron stopped and turned towards her, his expression tight. “I’m okay.”

“Ron, I...” Hermione took a breath. “I think we need to talk about—”

“No,” he shook his head, the summer sun reflecting brightly off of his copper hair. “We don’t need to talk about any of that. I don’t want to.”

“Ron—” she started.

“I mean it,” he said and moved a little closer to her. “It’s over. That’s all I need to know.”

She felt strangely cold despite the late June heat. Her expression tightened a little as she blinked a few times. They *should* talk about this. But... maybe now was not the time. Dumbledore lay entombed before them and Harry was starting to move off, trying to break away from the crowd as it marched back up towards the castle.

But, it didn’t *feel* over. It didn’t *feel* done. In fact, it felt stronger than ever, like one of her veins had broken free of her heart and was straining to get out, get to him.

Draco.

He had made all the wrong choices, but for all the right reasons. Everything he had done he had done for the people he loved, cared about, and wanted to protect. Hermione looked out over the lake again. Draco didn’t want to be a Death Eater or an Order member. He had taken her and was trying to leave with her, to go somewhere else. Away from all of this. With him.

And Godric help her weak soul, but a small part of her wished he had done it.

Harry came to find them a little while later. He had ended it with Ginny and Hermione saw the sad resolution on his face. This was what he had to do to keep her safe, even though it hurt. Was that so different from what Draco had done to her? Her heart was *tired*. It was tired from all the pain pumped through it, all the sorrow it had to hold, and all the hurt it had endured.

They stayed out by the lake for the rest of the afternoon. The train home was leaving tomorrow morning and normally she would want to head back up to the castle and spent the day packing; making sure she hadn’t forgotten anything and that everything was folded and organized and fit perfectly into her trunk, but right now all she wanted to do was sit with her friends in solace.

The war was here. It had started that night on the Astronomy tower and there was no stopping it now. He had told her it was coming, he had told her everything. Maybe he hadn’t lied, maybe she just hadn’t listened to what he was really saying. Hermione sat in between her two best friends and thought about Draco. Where was he now? What was he doing? Bellatrix had said Voldemort would be pleased with him, but he *had* failed in his mission. Would he be punished?

Would he be rewarded?

There was only one thing she knew for certain about Draco and what he would be doing now that he was no longer bound to the school for his mission.

“I will come for you, Hermione, I promise.”

The question was now, what she would do when he did.

Hermione bit her lip as the sun began to touch the far end of the lake, sinking quickly into the calm surface and the final rays of daylight burned on top of the dark waters.

26. epilogue

Epilogue

“Draco,” Granger placed her hand on his cheek, pushing her fingers into his hair a little.

Draco grinned and closed his eyes, feeling the warmth of her palm against his skin.

“Kiss me,” she said softly and Draco leaned forward, shifting on the bed and pressed his lips to hers. They were so soft and he could feel them spreading against his as she smiled wider. He wrapped his arms around her body, pulling her closer as he took her mouth. Vanilla and cinnamon swam into his senses and Draco spread his hands out across her back, tracing down her spine with long fingers.

“Mmm,” she pulled her lips into her mouth, tasting them and opened her bright cinnamon eyes. “I love this. I love you.”

“I love you too, Hermione. God, I love you.” It was burning in him. Hell didn’t hold a candle to this inferno and he could have spent an eternity with her, in her, and it would still not be enough.

“Then kiss me.” Her sweet lips pulled in another smile. “Kiss me, Draco. Touch me. Fu—”

A wave hit his face, flooding his mouth with salt water, choking him. Granger’s sweet smell vanished, as did the warmth of her hand, her soft lips. All of her.

Draco spluttered and spat out the water, coughing to clear his lungs of the harsh salt water. He pushed himself up, blinking heavily against the bright light around him. Despite the water dripping down his face, his lips were dry and chapped. All of his skin felt hot and tight, burning under the relentless sun above him.

He groaned as he sat up and saw the wine bottle sitting on the wet sand beside him. He had taken it with him before coming out here yesterday evening, after his Mother had screamed at him to get out, to leave. He had been more than happy to get out of the villa and away from his father’s blood curdling screams.

The warm weather was supposed to be helping his father, but Draco had not noticed much of an improvement. Lucius could hardly get out of bed on his own. Hell, he barely spoke besides his babbling. He shivered and screamed, eyes wide and wild as he thrashed about lost in his delirium.

“Draco! Help me hold him down!” His mother had called to him, trying to push down one of his father’s arms.

This wasn’t the first fit he had witnessed, but they all disturbed him just the same. Draco stared, appalled, at the ruined man twisting in the sheets. Dark runes, sigils, and numbers stained the grey skin underneath. His ribs were sticking out sharply and his muscles had

diminished to strings almost as thin as the lank blond hair that was left on the pillow every time Lucius lifted his head from it.

This was not his father. It couldn't be.

"Please!" his mother had begged and Draco moved quickly, holding his father's arm down at the wrist and shoulder as she tried to utter calming words between her tears. The fit passed after a moment and his father whimpered and moaned, sinking back into the bed, mumbling incoherently.

Narcissa bent over him, brushing her hands over his hollowed cheeks.

"My love, oh my love," she said tearfully. "You're safe. They can't get you here. Not here. Not with me beside you."

Draco felt the fight leave his father and let go of his arm. He watched his mother smooth his father's hair, whispering softly to him until his mumbling stopped. Lucius looked up at her with pale grey eyes, blinking them as he recognized her.

Then his thin arms reached up, latching around her and pulled her down to him. Narcissa held him back and buried her face in his neck, muffling the sound of her cries against his shaking body.

Draco turned away. He couldn't look at them. Didn't want to look at them. It hurt. In more ways than one. To see his parents, people he had once thought untouchable, reduced to this. Running, hiding, crying.

But at least they were together.

Not like him and Granger. He had left her there, in the mud, bruised and broken. Hurt. He had hurt her and he wasn't there to hold her and tell her it was alright.

After all his promises, after everything he had told her, he had hurt her again. He had tried so hard to—

Draco gritted his teeth. No. He couldn't keep replaying what happened on the tower. It drove him mad, thinking, *knowing*, that he had been so close, *so fucking close*...

And it hadn't been enough. He hadn't been enough. He had failed. Just like his fucking waste of a father.

Draco glared at the man he once revered.

"See? You're safe." His mother pulled the blanket up over him, covering a few of the tattoos on his chest. "I'm going to take care of you, protect you."

Draco's heart lurched in his chest painfully.

"Why bother?" Draco scoffed and she turned sharply towards him. "Fucking useless. You hear me, old man? You're nothing but a—"

"Draco!" He was surprised to see such frost covering his mother's normally gentle eyes. "I will not let you speak to your father this way—"

“That’s not my father!” Draco shouted, pointing at Lucius and meeting his bloodshot eyes for a second before quickly looking away. Then he mumbled, “That’s not my father.”

He had done all of this to save his father and this... this shell of a man was what he got in return.

“Maybe if you would have worked a little faster then he wouldn’t be in this condition.” His mother’s voice was soft, but clear and Draco felt the words cutting into him. She was right. He could have had his father out *weeks* ago. But he stayed. For her.

Lucius raised his hand up, as if he was reaching for his son, but fell short. Draco did not move.

“Maybe I should have waited another week and the dementors would have taken care of him for you.”

Narcissa’s blue eyes flashed in warning.

“Get out!” she hissed harshly, standing up and rounding on him. “Leave! Go drink until you pass out. That’s all you do anyways. Is that what took you so long? Getting pissed with your little friends while your father was being eaten alive?”

Deep anger flared up in Draco’s chest. But the truth was worse than her accusation. He hadn’t stayed at school to drink with his friends, he had stayed to keep fucking a Mudblood. He had stayed to try and make her fall in love with him. No, even worse than that— he had stayed because he loved *her*.

And then he had betrayed everyone and everything for her. For nothing.

Draco looked into the deep blue eyes of his mother and then to the floor. He was doing the same thing to her he had done to anyone who had ever shown him an ounce of kindness— hurt them and push them away. She was sitting here, trying to nurse her husband back to health and he was only making this harder on her.

“Grow up, Draco,” Narcissa snapped and turned away from him. ‘This family needs a Malfoy in charge and unfortunately,’ she glanced back at him. “You’re all we have right now.”

He had taken two of the wine bottles and headed out of the villa and onto the beach as the sun hit the horizon. It burned a deep orange as it sunk into the dark waves and Draco swallowed down mouthful after mouthful of the elven wine until he fell back against the still warm sand and watched the stars above swirl and sway.

He brought the bottle back up and sucked down the last drops. He tossed it and heard it land with a thud in the soft sand. In the distance he could hear his father screaming again. It was always worse at night. They had come here because the heat and the sun was supposed to be good for him, but the dark night brought all his nightmares back.

And Draco’s too.

“Granger... where are you?” he asked the foamed topped waves. He wanted nothing more than to get the fuck off this stupid little island and find her, take her, keep her. What had she done after he had... left her? Draco swallowed hard at the memory of her toffee curls, soaked in dirty water and her wide doe eyes looking up at him, so innocent. So... *pure*.

*“Draco... Don’t **do** this.”*

He grabbed the next bottle and summoned the cork from it, gulping down as much as he could before he pulled it away, gasping.

A wind whipped up from the ocean, pushing his white blonde hair up off his forehead before it returned back to toss the churning water. Another wave rushed up the beach, but this one fell short of him, only catching the empty wine bottle and lifting it before pulling down the shore.

He hated everything. Everyfuckingthing. Hated this fucking wine because it made him feel sick instead of drunk. Hated this island that he couldn’t fucking get off of. Hated this ocean keeping him from getting back to the one person who didn’t make him want to claw his eyes out at the sight of them. Granger. He wanted her so fucking bad. Just to be here. With him.

He felt as empty as the dark sky above him without even the light of the moon to glisten off of the black waters.

How many days had he been here? It took two or three days to get news to the island, but there hadn’t been much anyways and of course nothing mentioning her. The only thing that had really disturbed him was the Daily Prophet’s article titled *“Albus Dumbledore Remembered”*. Heavy guilt churned deep in him and Draco hadn’t even been able to finish the paper before ripping it up and throwing the scraps into the endless waves, beating against the shore.

He watched the waves until they made him feel sick and then laid back on the soft sand, staring up into the inky vastness of the night sky. What was she doing right now? Was she laying safe and warm in her bed? Tucked in tight? No... she was sitting up, reading the last few pages of some book that she had been the first to knock the dust off of in fifty years. She would blink her cinnamon eyes, finding them drier than she expected and rub them a little before sinking down against her pillow and promising herself just one more chapter.

Draco breathed in deeply, trying to focus on the distant light of the stars, but the wine had taken hold of him and a deep pressure pushed on the inside of his skull. It pushed against the back of his eyes and he felt his chest tighten in response. He hated everything. Everything but her.

He should be with her right now, but *everything* had gone wrong that night. She had been his— completely his. Then it had all gone to shit. And stuck here, he couldn’t help but dwell on it; going over every little detail, every single word, look, touch. If he didn’t stop replaying it all he would end up screaming bloody murder just like his father in there.

He drank the rest of the wine, hoping to drown out the images inside his head. He missed her. Fucking hell, he missed her. Did she miss him? Did she hate him? Of course she did. He had been brutal. But he had done what he had to in order to keep her safe. If Bellatrix had recognized her... Draco closed his eyes tightly as the image of Granger staring up at him from the mud puddle changed to her lying still and silent on the ground.

He wouldn’t let that happen. No matter what it took. No matter what he had to do. He had done what she— No. Draco swallowed hard. He hadn’t done what she asked. He had failed in that task as well. Dumbledore was dead and there was nothing he could do about that now. Now there was only one way to keep her safe. He had been a fool, a stupid love drunk fool, to

try any other way. And look where that got him— sitting on a shitty beach. Alone. Far, *far* away from her.

“I’ll come for you,” he whispered to the weak fires of the stars. “I will come for you, Hermione. I promise.”

The dull roar of the waves lulled him to sleep, blocking out the faint sounds of his father falling into another fit.

But now the sound of the waves was deafening as the effects of the wine pounded around inside his skull. He pulled himself up the beach some, out of the threat of the next set of waves rushing up the shore towards him. He blinked hard against the too bright light surrounding him. The sand was hot under his hands and Draco pressed them harder into it, wanting to feel something, anything, but the empty coldness that threatened to engulf him.

He didn’t want to be here. He wanted to be with her. No... that wasn’t entirely right either. He wanted *her* to be with *him*. But she was an ocean away. More than an ocean; she was a war away. A war that she’d be fighting against him. A war that he’d fight for her. Would she want to come with him? Would he have to *imperius* her again? She’d never trust him now. Never. Not after what he’d done.

And not if she knew what he was willing to do to get her back.

Draco looked out over the waves and saw dark clouds in the distance.

Please still love me.

He got to his feet, groaning when his head pounded at each beat of his heart and his burned skin protested at the movement. The sand was dry and thick and he fought his way up the beach and back into the villa.

There was a glass pitcher of water and Draco greedily drank as much as he could. The fresh, crisp water washed the last of the salt from his mouth and he smacked his lips as he placed the back on the counter, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He could feel the stubble on his chin getting thicker.

His skin was tender from the heat of the morning sun. There was a simple enough charm to protect against sunburns, but passed out on the sand, he unknowingly had been at the full mercy of the scorching sun. He looked down at his arms, red with white hairs. Then turning it over, the dark mark. The skin around it was untouched, pale and grey with a faint purple underneath. The sun’s heat had not reached it.

Lucius kept his well hidden, but Draco had seen it a few times growing up. His most vivid memory of it was when his father rolled up his sleeves to finish off a stag that Draco’s hounds had brought down. His father dismounted gracefully from his white stallion and unbuttoned the cuffs of his sleeves, pulling them up before turning to his son and holding his hand out for the knife. Draco barely heard him as he stared at the skull and snake on his father’s forearm.

It was identical to the one that had been branded on his own skin and it bore the same bruised shadow around it. It would never heal. It would never end.

“Draco!” Lucius had snapped and Draco jumped, pulling the blade from its sheath and handing it to his father. “Call back your hounds, they’ll spoil the meat.”

Draco snapped his fingers and his hounds retreated, circling around his mount whining with red, lolling tongues.

His father had set to work. In the middle of the woods, with no one around, Lucius had not been scared to bare his Lord's mark. It was the last thing the stag ever saw before he cut his throat.

But that was back when his father still took him on hunts. Before the Dark Lord returned and his father got too busy, too serious, to spend any of his spare time with his less than perfect son. His mother still made the house elves set the table for three every evening, even when it was painfully obvious Lucius would not be home. Even at fourteen, Draco had been able to see the strain this put on his mother and had done his best to be there for her.

He should go and apologize to her. Draco knew he had been uncommonly cruel to her yesterday and then left her alone with her ailing husband all night. Her expression would be cold and disdainful, but if he brought what was left of this water and maybe sat with his father so she could have a few moments to herself he knew that by this evening she would have put his indiscretion behind her.

Draco summed a goblet and grabbed the pitcher of water off of the counter and headed through the long open halls of the villa to his father's room.

"Just a little more," his mother's soft voice reached him as he stepped over the threshold. "There, all done."

His father was sitting up in bed and his mother dabbed at his face, cleaning the remnants of shaving cream from his chin. She held up a silver mirror for him to look in. "So handsome," she murmured and kissed his smooth, hollow cheek.

Lucius stared at himself until she took the mirror away and mumbled a small "Thank you."

Draco took another step in as Narcissa busied herself, cleaning up the bowl, towel, and razor she had been using and setting it far away from the bed. Lucius looked up at him, a bit more reason in his pale grey eyes than there had been before.

"Son."

"Father."

Draco poured the water into the goblet and handed it to him. Lucius took it with a shaking hand, slopping a little over the side. He tried to drink it, but ended up spilling more than he got in his mouth.

Useless.

Draco looked away.

"I didn't think we would be seeing you today," Narcissa commented dryly as she wiped her small hands off and pushed a lock of her silver blonde hair that had fallen from her loose bun.

"I'm feeling better."

"So is your father," her eyes were like ice. "No thanks to you."

Lucius coughed a little and Narcissa took the goblet from him so he could lay back again.

Draco stared at the floor, not wanting to look at either of his parents. “I can go if you want.”

“No. I want to take him out for some fresh air today and I’ll need your help.”

A warm breeze blew through the open window, but Draco held back his smart remark. His mother seemed to be waiting on him to say something sarcastic and when he didn’t her expression softened fractionally.

The last thing he wanted to do was go sit on the beach again under the blaring sun when his head was still throbbing and his skin was still burning, but what else was he going to do? This was his life, for however long they were on this island, and he had to live it. At least he wasn’t living it at the Dark Lord’s feet.

Yet.

Narcissa was folding a spare blanket and moved past Draco to set it on a chair.

“I know this is hard for you, but he needs you right now.”

“Yes, Mother.”

“He’s getting better. You didn’t see him when he first arrived. Being here is helping and in another week he will—”

Draco groaned, gritting his teeth together as Lucius cried out, writhing on the bed.

His mark, *their* marks, were burning. But not like the tender heat of his skin, this felt acidic. Poisonous. Corrosive.

Draco growled, clasp his hand to his arm and looked up into his mother’s deep blue eyes, as wide as the coastline behind her. They began to fill with a thin line of water.

“*Return.*” That high, hissing voice made Draco’s skin crawl and for a moment even the heat of his sunburn left him.

Then the pain was gone, resonating as only a dull, deep ache. Draco gasped, sucking down a few heavy breaths and looked at his father. Lucius was whimpering, cradling his arm to his chest and staring straight back at Draco.

He heard his mother inhale sharply and then she rushed to her husband’s side, pushing his hair out of his face and running her hands down his arms and chest. Over the runes and symbols, over the waxy skin, and finally over the mark. Lucius shuddered, then quieted.

Draco’s pulse was slamming through his veins, carrying with it hot adrenaline. His arm ached and his fingers went numb. The coldness spread across his chest. His lungs seized up and he could not take air into his lungs. The island he had been cursing these last days had been a reprieve, a sanctuary. But no longer. He was a Death Eater and his Lord was calling him.

After a moment Lucius sat himself up and did his best to swing his legs over the side of the bed. Narcissa kept her hands on him, steadying him. Draco couldn’t breathe. His chest was tight and he couldn’t get his lungs to work.

Lucius shakily pushed himself up, swaying on his feet. His voice was raspy when he spoke. “He called... you too?” It seemed even that simple phrase was hard for him to get out and he was breathing heavily from his efforts.

Narcissa was holding onto her husband’s arm, trying to help him balance when she glanced back at her son.

Draco nodded, refusing to meet his mother’s eyes which were staring at him, wide with fear. He forced himself instead to keep his gaze trained on the pale greys of his father, almost the same shade as his ashen skin.

“We must...” Lucius panted. “Obey.”

Draco said nothing, but turned away, walking stiffly out of the room.

They were going back. But to what? He had no idea what lay waiting for him back home. Another gentle briny breeze blew into the long, open halls of the villa, but Draco’s body was too numb to feel it. He was going back. Back to his life. Back to his Lord. Back to *her*.

Soundtrack

“On the Nature of Daylight” — Max Richter

“You Know Me Too Well” — Nothing But Thieves (Chapter 3)

“Oysara” — Tony Anderson (Chapter 5)

“Use Me Up” — Until the Ribbon Breaks (Chapter 9)

“It Will Come Back” — Hozier (Chapter 13)

“Convalescence” — Message to Bears (Chapter 16)

“Misquote” (Acoustic) — Super Whatevr (Chapter 17)

“Leave Like That” — SYML ft. Jean Champion (Chapter 19)

“Maniac” — Phoebe Green (Chapter 19) — Draco’s theme

“Mixed Signals” — Ruth B (Chapter 20)

“Break My Baby” — Kaleo (Chapter 21)

“Cringe” — Matt Maeson (Chapter 21)

“No Time to Die” — Billie Eilish (Chapter 22)

“Tribulation” (Stripped) — Matt Maeson (Chapter 22)

“Devil Like Me” — Akine (Chapter 23) — Hermione’s theme

“Persephone” — Tamino (Chapter 23)

“The Hearse” (Stripped) — Matt Maeson (Chapter 24)

“Dawn, the Front” — Talos (Chapter 24)

“Power” — Isak Danielson (Chapter 25)

“The Enemy” — Andrew Belle (Chapter 25)

“Face of the Father” — Tony Anderson (Epilogue)

27. zero

Draco lifted his eyes up from the page when he heard the gate creak open then quickly slam shut again. It was late; after hours and there shouldn't be anyone wandering around the castle, especially not in the Restricted Section. No one *good* anyways.

Ripping the page from *Perilous Poisons* and ignoring the half torn warning not to brew this without Ministry approval, he snapped the book shut and placed it in the wrong spot on the shelf. If anyone came looking for information on Slughorn's mead, they'd have to find the damn book first. Good luck with that in here.

Still, he didn't put it past Saint Potter and his little groupies to come sniffing around.

It didn't matter. Draco folded the paper carefully and tucked it in his pocket. If— no, *when* — the poison worked, he would already be home for the holidays and would never have to see Potter's stupid scar, Weasley's dumb face, or fucking Granger's ugly hair again. He smirked. Maybe Dumbledore would invite them all in for a toast on Christmas and he could kill four birds with one stone.

His Master would grant him position and power above all others if he was able to do that and his family name would be restored from all the damage his Father had done to it.

If.

Draco stared into the darkness and felt the emptiness inside him grow cold. Thinking about killing one person was one thing, but four? Just the old man, he decided and headed off to find his intruder.

Anyways, Potter and pals probably didn't even drink. Hell, Granger would probably pass out just with a whiff from the small bottle of Ogden's he had taken to carrying around in his pocket. Fucking prude.

Draco pulled his wand out of his pocket. Whoever had snuck into the Restriction Section was obviously up to no good and he was not about to be caught unaware by them. Either that or it was someone like Filch patrolling. A squib like that should have been drowned at birth.

Fuck, it was probably Snape. The fucker had taken too much of a bloody interest in him lately and Draco was now having to dodge his Godfather every time he wanted to take two steps out of the dungeons. The sooner he was out of this school, the fucking better.

Draco liked the idea of being far away, safe in his Manor, and not having to see Dumbledore actually die. He didn't even like thinking about it, let alone watching it. He didn't like *death*. He had bought the cursed necklace and imperiused that girl in the hope of not actually doing the deed his Master had given him.

But he should have known better than to rely on a Gryffindor and of fucking course Potter somehow intervened. Draco rolled his eyes. Did his scar *tingle* when evil was afoot? Draco

hoped it fucking *burned*.

He could hear someone moving around in an aisle nearby and moved silently through the darkness. The stacks were close together in the Restricted Section and oftentimes if he turned around, the books had shifted and it would be a completely different aisle he was in. Sneaking up on someone in here was harder than it seemed because you never knew when they would just— *appear*.

He didn't like surprises. He *liked* being in control and in charge of situations. Especially when they involved a clandestine meeting in the Library after dark. And he *really* liked the fact that it was not Filch or Snape that had wandered into the stacks with him, but none other than the dirty little Mudblood he had just been thinking about.

Truthfully, he thought about her a lot. Many of those thoughts took place in this very Library. And it *may* be interesting to see what Goody Granger was doing sneaking around the Restricted Section late at night for. At least he'd get to fuck with her a little. And *maybe*...

Draco advanced on her, quiet at first, but then tapped his fingers along the shelf in anticipation. Oh this was going to be *fun*.

"And what exactly is the Gryffindor Princess doing wandering around the Restricted Section after hours?" He made sure to sound as bored as possible even though he could feel a predatory instinct rising up in him as he moved closer to her.

The Mudblood turned and glared at him as she often did. Even narrowed, her eyes were still big. Too big for her face. If she was a pureblood, they would be the proper size. Further proof of her ill breeding. As if the atrocious hair wasn't enough.

She surprised him by snapping back at him quickly, "None of your business!"

Interesting.

Draco forced a laugh from the back of his throat and cocked an eyebrow up, making her glare harder at him. Good. He loved getting under her skin. "Something the matter, Granger? You're a bit touchy tonight."

Something flickered in her too big eyes, but she turned away too quickly for him to narrow in on it. "Go away."

This fucking little Mudblood thought she could tell *him* what to do? She had another thing coming if she thought she could get away talking to him like that. And he knew just the thing to make her shut the fuck up and learn her place. He tightened his grip on his wand, raising it up in the darkness.

A floating blue candle hovered overhead and Draco saw the glimmer of tears under her eyes. He hesitated.

"What?" Granger rounded on him, almost surprising him with her fire in her voice after seeing the water on her face.

"You've been crying." He hadn't meant to say it. Fuck, he hadn't meant to stand here, gaping at her like an idiot either. But he was just... *shocked*. In all the years he had tormented her, Draco had never once seen her cry. What had happened that finally broke the little lion girl?

“Who made you cry?”

Shit. Shit. Shit. Did he fucking just ask that? Fuck. If she said anything back, he’d say he wanted to shake their hand. Wanted to thank them and build a statue in their honor. Wanted to know who the fuck could break her down when he never had.

“Afraid someone is taking your place?”

Draco opened his mouth to tell her to get fucked when she gave a small sniff and he felt the blood rush from his head.

He hardened his expression, turning it cold and hoping she would fucking walk away. Or not. He... He wasn’t sure. He just knew he didn’t like *this*. Didn’t like that someone *else* made her cry. Especially before he got the pleasure.

“No one takes anything from me.”

Draco crowded her, making up his mind in that moment that he didn’t want her to go at all. He wanted her, right where she was. If his plan for the poison worked, then he would be gone for good soon and would never get another chance to find out if her pussy was as good as he had always imagined. He had sworn no more virgins, but... Granger was a Mudblood. She didn’t count. She wasn’t a *real* person. She wasn’t anything.

And he would prove that to himself by bending her over like he did any other other bitch who stared at him the way she did. Because she could try and hide it, but she did *stare*. He knew it, because he pictured her little shocked face every time he caught her looking when he closed his eyes and railed into whatever girl was underneath him.

Yeah. He needed to fuck her.

“Well all I need is this book.”

Oh fuck that.

Draco snatched the book she was reaching for off the shelf. If she wanted it that badly, she could beg for it.

“Give it back, Malfoy.”

Oh he would have to teach her then! Good thing Granger was a quick learner because Draco didn’t have the time for any lengthy lessons.

He smirked, unable to stop it and honestly, not really wanting to because it made her face fall into a cute little pout. He liked how easy it was to see what she was feeling. Maybe big eyes were good for something after all.

“*Wicked Warlocks of the Western World.*” *Merlin, Granger.* “But you’re such a good little girl, what would you even do with a book like this?”

“Read it.” She went for the book, but Draco’s Seeker muscles contracted out of memory and he held it up above his head. Watching her gaze travel up his arm to the green leather book, Draco felt his lips twitch wider as he bent his head just a little closer to hers.

He had to admit, she was cute. In a Mudblood kind of way.

Then her body collided with his and her hands slid down his arm to rest on his chest and holy fuck— her palms were *warm*. Thankfully his heart stopped beating or he swore she would be able to hear it considering how close she was to him.

Then Granger's fingers curled against his chest and Draco's cock got hard.

"Granger." She looked up at him and he watched the deep brown of her eyes brighten at the sound of her name. Very interesting. "You're touching me."

And you like it, don't you? You dirty little Mudblood.

He didn't let an ounce of the lust pumping in his veins show on his face. Not until he saw it on hers first. Then he'd cover that pretty face with his come and make her lick it off like the animal she was.

Granger jumped away from him as if she knew what he was thinking of doing to her. "Afraid I'll get you dirty?"

Goddamn it, did she *want* him to fuck her against the stacks? Did she have any idea how sexy it was to hear *her* say that to him?

"Quite the opposite," he breathed out and watched her blink her doe eyes. Oh fuck. What the *fuck* did he just say? No, he'd fix this. "You ought to be more careful. You could get yourself in a lot of trouble doing something like that."

Granger lifted her chin and he fought to keep his eyes from darting down to her neck. "Is that a threat?"

"Yes." Draco towered over her, liking how she tilted her head back to keep eye contact. "That is most definitely a threat."

He expected her to gasp and back away, but Granger surprised him, by saying "Try me."

He was straining against his trousers now and wanted to push Granger to her knees and make her pay for doing this to him when he saw that the fire in her eyes had nothing to do with the heat in his blood.

He was a fucking Death Eater of the Dark Lord, what was he doing trying to fuck a Mudblood like her?

Ridiculous. And she couldn't even ask for her book back, she'd never beg him for his cock.

"If I even thought for a minute you actually meant that..."

"You think I'm all talk? Everyone thinks I'm just some bookworm, don't they?" Granger was getting louder, but Draco couldn't stop himself from wanting to hear more. "They think I am just some robot that feeds off of routines and repetition. That I'm nothing but "good old Granger" who never does anything she isn't supposed to!"

He watched her cheeks flush a beautiful shade of red as she tossed her hands up and let them fall down by her sides again before sighing and saying, "I don't know. Maybe they're right."

No, they weren't right at all. She wasn't a no one who should be folded away in the pages of a book. She wasn't boring or droll or any of the things her stupid little friends thought she was. Granger *wanted* to do all those things, but being the good girl she naturally was, she needed *permission*.

But she didn't know. Granger had no idea what she really was.

And she needed him to tell her, show her, what her true nature was.

Fucking Salazar, she was... *just like him*.

The muscles in his arm were all taunt and tensed, but he kept them restrained as he grabbed onto the side of her neck, feeling the heat of her skin deepen where her thick curls rested against it. Draco shoved his thumb under her chin and forced those eyes back up so he could watch them widen in shock.

"Oh Granger, you're so much more than that."

Her lips parted with a sharp breath and Draco instinctively bent down to take him between his. He was hit with a wave of something sweet and suddenly he was tempted not to only capture her lips, but to bite down on them until she whimpered out his name.

Draco emptied his mind, taking control of his body again before he acted on the thoughts that plagued him every day. Every night. He had never really taken them seriously before, just something to play around with when he was... well.

But here she was and he'd be damned that if he kissed her right now, she wouldn't kiss him back. His eyes flickered over her face and he saw the glint of shine from her tears.

No. Not tonight. He thumbed her jawline, still wet, but soft and warm under the tip of his finger.

"Let me know if you ever want to find out what that is," he said in a heavily controlled whisper and then moved back from her.

Because if he didn't, he was going to fuck her *right now*. Tear-stained or not.

Draco backed up, watching as she took large breaths, keeping her eyes closed. He half expected her to take off running, but once again, Granger surprised him.

She stayed, right where he left her. Draco brought his thumb up to his mouth and softly sucked the taste of her tears off of it before giving in and letting out a low chuckle. Yes, Granger was certainly much more than he had given her credit for and now all those little fantasies and why he could never shake her from his head all started to make sense.

Draco watched her chest heave with a shaky breath. The Mudblood was smart and eager to learn; she would come to him. He knew she would.

Good girl.
